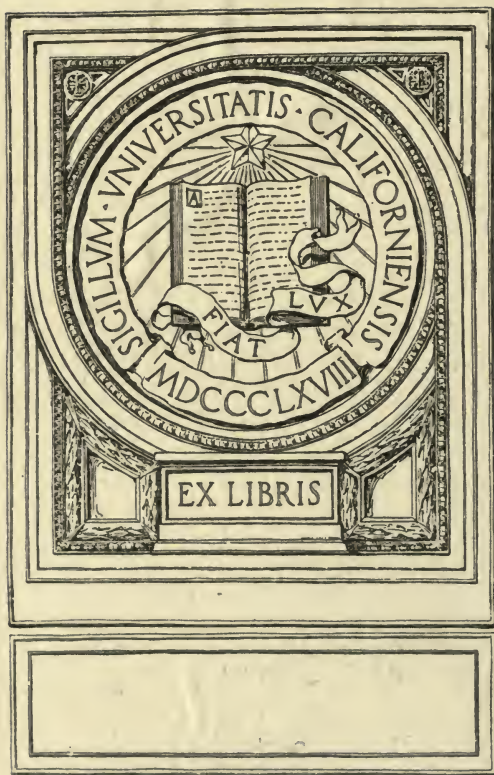


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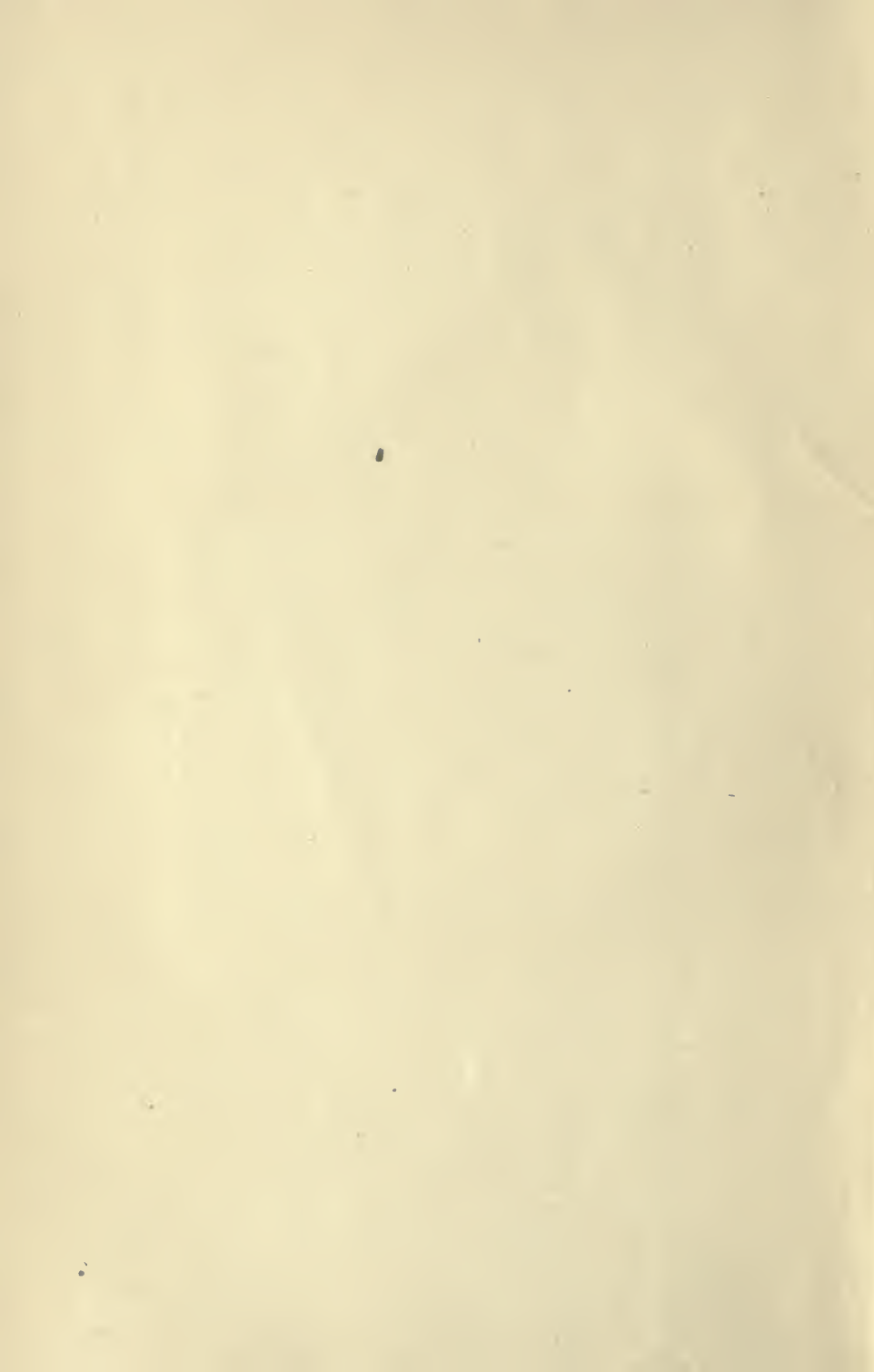
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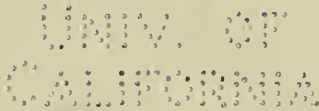


*Madame la Duchesse du Maine*  
*From the Collection of M. Godefroy Mayer, Paris.*



# A PRINCESS OF STRATEGY

THE LIFE OF ANNE LOUISE BÉNÉDICTE  
DE BOURBON-CONDÉ DUCHESSE DU MAINE  
TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH OF  
GENERAL DE PIÉPAPE BY J. LEWIS MAY  
WITH A PHOTOGRAVURE FRONTISPIECE  
AND SIXTEEN OTHER ILLUSTRATIONS



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## PREFACE

**T**O exercise a predominating influence over one's contemporaries is a high destiny for one of exalted lineage or commanding intellect, but it is dangerous—as dangerous as it is discreditable—for the great ones of the world to enter into a covenant with the enemies of the constitution. Such, nevertheless, was the example but too frequently set by the House of Condé in the seventeenth century, particularly by the ladies of the Fronde, and, in the eighteenth, the Duchesse du Maine, whose character is more calculated to excite our curiosity than to engage our sympathy, was fain to follow in their footsteps. History is far from presenting her in so winning a light as her great-aunt, Madame de Longueville, though in more respects than one there is a resemblance between them. Like her aunt, she was born beneath the shadow of the throne, and like her aunt she was possessed with the spirit of adventure. She, too, deemed it in her power, for one brief moment in her career, to set at defiance the constituted rulers of her country. But although she had shown herself as firm of purpose as the sister of the great Condé, she found it impossible to sustain for long so daring an undertaking. She did not carry on her campaign in the open, as her aunt had done. She was content to weave her plots in the dark, and then to depart to prison. Her policy was marred by the same mistakes and suffered the same reverses as her forerunner's. By way of consolation, Madame de Longueville possessed

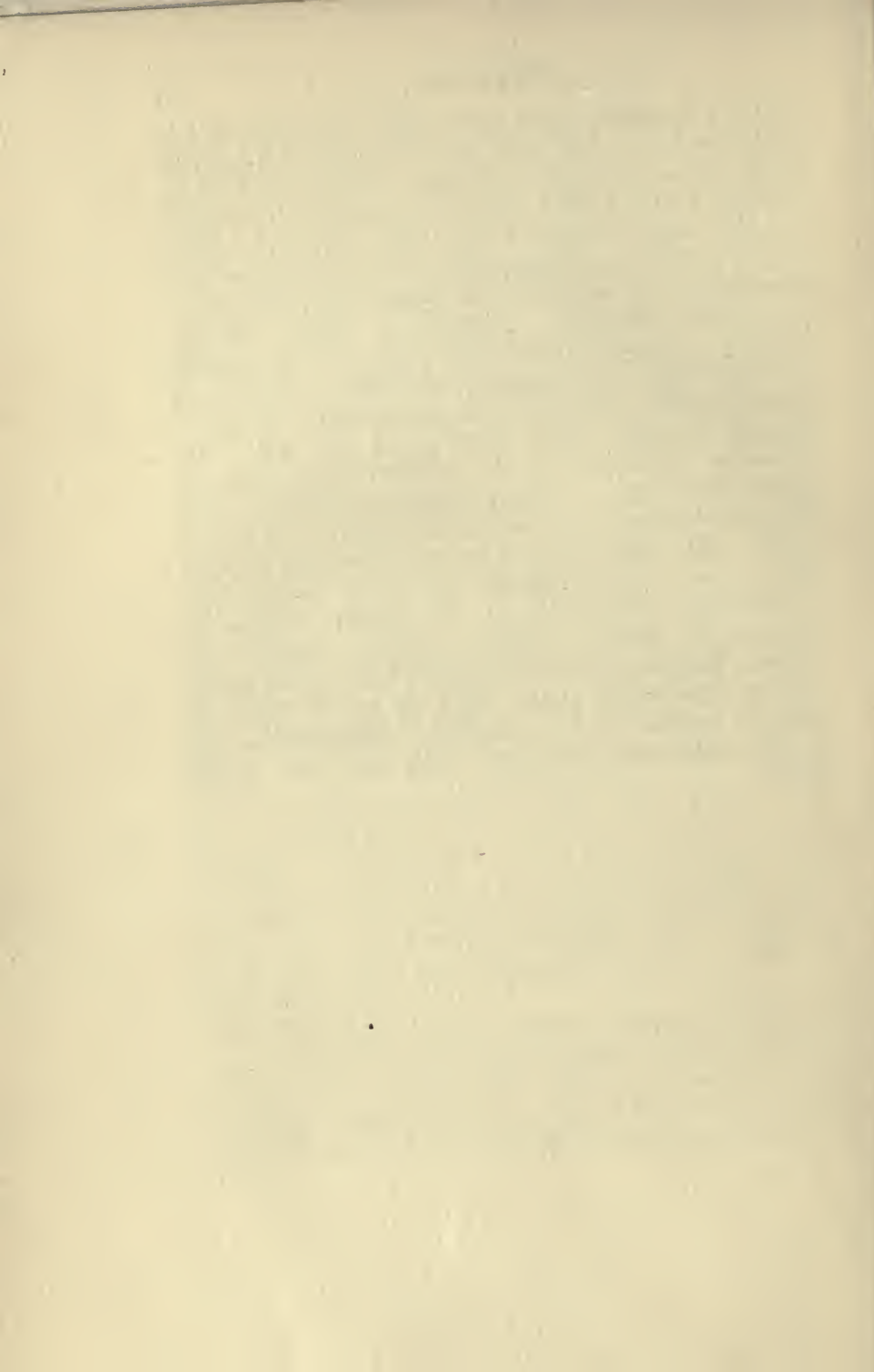
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a lovely face, and Madame du Maine a brilliant intellect. Though her conduct was never signalised by any striking affair of the heart, she devoted herself to love of another order, a species of "literary gallantry." Endowed with a number of conspicuous talents, which, however, were often foiled by errors of judgment; gifted with a rapier wit, and exhibiting at once the haughtiness of a princess and the selfishness of a woman of the world, she occupied, amid the unsettled conditions of the time, a position of social and political renown. As Châtelaine of Sceaux and ringleader of the Cellamare conspiracy, she imposes a twofold claim on the attentions of the student of history.

At the beginning of the eighteenth century, Woman was looked up to much as she had been in the age of Pericles and in that of Leo X., and the luxury and splendour amid which this strange fay-like little creature passed her days, seem as unreal, as unsubstantial, to our generation as the conditions of her epoch differ from those of the present time. The narrative of her amazing caprices reads like the tale of some princess of fairyland; Sainte-Beuve, indeed, it reminded of a story from the Arabian Nights. More recently, Madame Arvède Barine, whose loss is so universally deplored, has dealt with her career in a brilliant and incisive study. We behold in the Duchesse du Maine one of the final efflorescences of the reign of Louis XIV., one of the last to manifest the absolutism of an aristocracy of which La Bruyère, anticipating the modern verdict, declared that "it failed to understand public affairs just as it failed to understand its own real interests."

Whilst the more advanced spirits of the age, piercing the veil of the future, were already contemplating the new order of things and evincing their readiness to discard, for the sake of generations to come, many of their long-cherished predilections, the Duchesse du Maine was so deeply imbued

with the traditional and immemorial prejudices of her class, that, for her, all France was represented and summed up in her own Court at Sceaux. Considered in conjunction with the ideas, with the principal personalities and the various events of her epoch, her story carries with it something of deeper import than the mere interest attaching to the study of the manners and customs of a vanished generation. Madame du Maine and her entourage display all the recklessness, all the careless insouciance that characterised the loftiest ranks of the French nobility, as well as all the frivolity and all the elegance of the "beaux esprits" of the day. Her ephemeral appearance in the political arena made its appeal, even then, to the revolutionary passions which were smouldering deep down in the hearts of the French people. Her salon marks a stage intermediate between those of the Grand Monarch and of the philosophers. It precedes and heralds in the literary coteries of Madame de Tencin, Madame Geoffrin, Madame du Deffand, Madame de Boufflers, Mademoiselle de Lespinasse, and the Princesse de Conti; while the society which she gathered around her is a souvenir of Rambouillet, even as the Cellamare conspiracy recalls the days of the Fronde.



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A PRINCESS OF STRATEGY





# A PRINCESS OF STRATEGY

## CHAPTER I

Birth of Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon-Condé (8th November 1676)—Her father, Prince Henri Jules—Her mother, Anne of Bavaria—Disposition and education of Mademoiselle de Charolais—Her precocity—Proposal to wed her to the Comte de Vermandois—The Duc du Maine—His education by Madame de Maintenon—His aptitudes—His appointments—His first campaigns (1688-1690)—His lack of military talent—His virtues—His marriage to Mademoiselle de Charolais (19th March 1692)—Descriptions of the Duchesse du Maine.

**B**Y his marriage with Claire Clémence de Maillé-Brézé, the great Condé had one son, whom the malevolent used to call "M. le Prince tout court" to distinguish him from "M. le Prince le Héros" his father. The son was hardly to be accounted the equal of his sire, whether mentally or physically. Nevertheless, in the records of his household accounts, religiously preserved among the manuscripts of the Bibliothèque Nationale, we find him described by the following grandiose array of titles: "Henri-Jules de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, Prince of the Blood, Grand-Master of France, son of Louis II. called M. le Prince le Héros, Duc d'Enghien et de Châteauroux, the King's Governor and Lieutenant-General in His Majesty's provinces of Burgundy and Bresse, and resident at his

mansion in the rue Saint Laurent in the parish of Saint Sulpice."

The Hôtel de Condé was a vast structure surrounded by a garden of modest dimensions, and had been erected by the Gondis in the sixteenth century. It was thence that the unhappy Princess Claire Clémence was sent into exile by her inexorable spouse. There, on the 8th November 1676, was born Anne Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon, generally known as Mademoiselle de Charolais, the future Duchesse du Maine.<sup>1</sup> She was the eighth child and the third daughter of Prince Henri Jules and Anne of Bavaria.

Though in his general appearance there was some hint of his illustrious origin, and though certain of his contemporaries have made mention of his "lofty tastes and magnificent generosity," the Prince Henri Jules was both physically and morally a sorry scion of the famous Condé. He was short and he was fat. His features were not cast in a heroic mould, and, on the whole, there was little about him to remind one of the shapely figure, the graceful bearing and soldierly carriage of his father. His lack of stature he may possibly have owed to his mother, for Claire Clémence, we are told, "was very small, with an insignificant face and the mind and body of a child."<sup>2</sup> As we shall see, these characteristics were to some extent inherited by her granddaughter, Mademoiselle de Charolais, the heroine of this story. The portraits at Chantilly and Versailles show us nothing of the bodily defects of Prince Henri Jules, which, how-

<sup>1</sup> See, for the Duchesse du Maine, the following authorities: The Memoirs of Saint-Simon, La Fare, Madame de Caylus, Madame de Lafayette, Souches, Marmontel, d'Argenson, Villars, Luynes, Hénault, Bachaumont, Soulavie, Mme du Hausset, Longchamp, Boisjourdain, Le Kain; as well as the Letters of Mmes de Sévigné, de Maintenon, la Palatine, of Mmes de Caylus and du Deffand, of Madame de Staal, d'Houdart de Lamotte, Voltaire, etc.

<sup>2</sup> Duc d'Aumale, "History of the Condé Family."

ever, almost amounted to deformity. Restless, eccentric, witty, ambitious, and brave, he was devoid of military talent, nor did he enjoy the reputation of being a first-rate courtier; though we hear of his learning, the refinement of his manners, and his mental resourcefulness. He retained the traditional pride of his line and venerated his father, whose life he had saved at the battle of Senef. His habits of gallantry involved him in more than one adventure with the sex. "Monseigneur," a wise and witty little bourgeoisie once said to him, when he was somewhat over-vigorously laying siege to her charms, "Monseigneur, Your Highness is so good as to be *too* insolent."

After his father's death in 1686, his great ambition was to obtain the *grandes entrées* or permanent right of access to the King's chamber, a childish honour on which his thoughts were busy day and night. As he grew old, he became a veritable domestic tyrant. He suffered from some chronic nervous disorder and became, at last, a prey to eccentricities that were not far removed from madness. At Court his antics were the delight of the King's entourage. One of his ancestors used to imagine himself a bird and would go about displaying his wings; and he himself, towards the end of his life, would, during his fits, which became more and more frequent, suddenly begin to bark like a dog, to the consternation or amusement of the courtiers. We shall shortly have to relate the melancholy circumstances of his death.

History has quite a different story to tell of his wife, Anne of Bavaria,<sup>1</sup> the second daughter of Edward, Count Palatine of the Rhine, and of Anne de Gonzague of Cleves, who was married to Henri Jules in the year 1663. She has incurred the ridicule of Saint-Simon because she was

<sup>1</sup> Born 13th March 1648 and married 11th December 1663, she was left a widow in 1709.

“plain and rather hump-backed.” Her modest and unremarkable characteristics have kept her more or less in the background, and it is not easy to form a mental picture of her somewhat shadowy personality. However, she possessed the qualities of an excellent wife and mother, and despite the oft-repeated infidelities of Henri Jules, presented him with ten children, some of whom died in infancy. Timid and weak-willed, sensible rather than clever, and more liberally endowed with good qualities than good looks—she was forever having to bow to the despotic will of her husband, like a frail flower unceasingly tormented by the blast. Madame la Princesse, as she was called until her death, always played a secondary albeit a beneficent rôle, in the Condé household, where she was scarcely better treated than her mother-in-law had been. Domestic discord, it seems, was traditional there, and was destined to remain so to the end of the chapter.

Nevertheless, harshly dealt with as she was,<sup>1</sup> Anne of Bavaria was not subjected to the same rigorous seclusion that had been the lot of the great Condé's wife. Her prisons were two: Chantilly and the Hôtel de Condé. From these she scarcely ever issued, dwelling there side by side with her tyrant of a husband. From this ill-assorted union there survived but one son, Louis III. de Bourbon-Condé. In the intervals of lying-in, the mother busied herself exclusively with her daughters' education, a task which monopolized all her time and turned her into a sort of Cinderella of the domestic hearth. As though they were fated never to attain their full development, those of their offspring who were not cut off by death never reached any but a stature far below the

<sup>1</sup> She put up, like a sensible woman, with her husband's various liaisons. He showed her no further consideration than that to which her rank and position entitled her. Ezechiel Spanheim, “Relation de la Cour de France en 1690.”

average. Whenever occasion drew his attention to it, Condé, the grandfather, who had high dreams of the destinies of his line, would work himself into a state of desperation. "At this rate," he used to exclaim, "the members of our family will grow smaller and smaller, till they come to nothing at all!"

But this was not the mother's sole trial. How was she to train her children's hearts and minds, what measures was she to take for their healthy development, when their father, with his violent explosions of temper, and his extraordinary idiosyncrasies was forever thwarting the maternal task? "The unmarried daughters," says Saint-Simon, "used to wish themselves slaves."

Monsieur le Prince rarely took notice of any of his children except, indeed, when he wished to cross or annoy their mother. His ambition blinded him to every consideration save one, which was to find a means of linking himself still more closely to the Throne. Even when his children were no more than babies, he was possessed with the idea of marrying them to Royalty, even though it were Royalty from the wrong side of the bed. For two of his children this fate was in store: his only son and one of his daughters.

We are not overburdened with detail concerning the childhood of Mademoiselle de Charolais. We know that it passed amid a calm only diversified by her father's outbreaks of temper, now at Chantilly, now at the Hôtel de Condé, and occasionally at Versailles. Though she was ten years old when her illustrious grandfather died, almost all she knew of him was what she had gathered from public report. It may have been that her imagination was stirred by the stately air and fiery enthusiasm of the old man, whose spirit age and infirmity had not availed to subdue. At all events his memory was destined to exert an abiding influence over the career of the future Duchesse du Maine. From her earliest years, Anne

Louise Bénédicte had received from her mother a training not a whit less painstaking than that which had been bestowed upon her sisters, whom she surpassed, if not in kindness of heart, at all events in intelligence and love for study. From the time she was fourteen or fifteen, she displayed a capacity for grasping a marvellous variety of ideas. She had an excellent memory and a ready intelligence, although even then she had given evidence of an independent, hot-tempered and overbearing disposition. In more than one particular we are reminded of what Condé had been in his relationship with his own family. We see the same rapidity of retort, the same instantaneous illumination of the mind, the same flashes of genius; but also the same violence, the same haughtiness, the same undisciplined and capricious imagination. These racial qualities and defects did not cease with her. The overweening element in their nature afflicted them all with a trace of insanity, and Louis III., Mademoiselle de Charolais' brother, inherited no less a share of it than his father Henri Jules. As for the great Condé himself, had not the Fronde been his particular manifestation of the ancestral taint? If he had recovered his balance it must be confessed that it had suffered a rude shock. There was much more of her father's nature in Louise Bénédicte than of Anne of Bavaria's German placidity. The mother watched with ceaseless solicitude over her daughter. The latter, a tiny, doll-like, fair-haired blue-eyed little creature, possessed a face whose charm lay rather in its eager expressiveness than in the regularity of its features. She had quick lively eyes and a mischievous mouth, and although she had some slight blemish on her right arm, which, according to the malicious Madame la Palatine, was of a scrofulous nature, her dainty little person spoke grace in every movement. On the other hand, she had a very uncertain temper and a disdainful manner. She was disrespectful

towards her father, overbearing towards her sisters, and pert towards those to whom she should have shown respect, not excepting the King himself. She was, in a word, a spoilt child, unmanageable and insufferable, for all her talents and precocity. "She follows her wilful and frivolous tastes," wrote the Marquis de Lassay, "whithersoever they lead her, with never a thought for duty or decorum, and always with an utter disregard for the consequences." Mischief and she were early acquaintances. One evening at the King's supper-table—it was the day her brother was married—she, in company with two other frolicsome young ladies, Mademoiselle de Conti and Mademoiselle de Blois, was seated near old Mademoiselle de Montpensier. The queer old lady began to cough and the three of them burst out laughing. La Grande Mademoiselle was notoriously "touchy," and this breach of manners of course annoyed her exceedingly. From that day forth she was always very severe with her cousin and treated her very harshly, despite the intervention of no less a person than the King himself. At the age of fifteen—she was then thought very advanced for her age—Louise Bénédicte took up her literary and scientific studies under Sauveur and La Bruyère, her brother's two tutors. It was to the celebrated author of "Les Caractères" that the little princess was, in part, indebted for her aptitude in belles-lettres and her resourcefulness of mind. It is to be regretted that he did not also bequeath her that steadiness of judgment which is the philosopher's exclusive possession. But frivolity occupied too large a share in her composition to admit of any great degree of thoughtfulness. She was an omnivorous reader, devouring her authors wholesale, without giving herself time to digest their substance, and while she thus acquired a mass of information that was almost encyclopædic in its range, her knowledge was very superficial. However, it permitted her to display

a passing acquaintance with almost any subject and to dabble in all kinds of literature. What more could a woman ask—princess though she were—who wanted to shine as an “intellectual” and a “bel-esprit”?

As soon as she reached the age of sixteen, Henri Jules had but one idea, which was to find for her a match similar to that which he had engineered for her brother the Duke, who had obtained the hand of Mademoiselle de Nantes, the illegitimate daughter of the King and Madame de Montespan. His eldest daughter, Mademoiselle de Bourbon, had already contracted a brilliant union with her cousin, François Louis de Conti, prince de la Roche-sur-Yon. Mademoiselle de Condé, the youngest child, was ridiculously undersized, like her father, and marriage, in her case, was practically out of the question. She was very jealous of Mademoiselle de Charolais who was next to her in age, because the latter boasted an extra inch in height; an advantage to which the future Duchesse du Maine owed the shaping of her destiny.

Long before she was old enough to be married, her father, actuated wholly and solely by motives of personal ambition, had promised her to the Comte de Vermandois, the natural son of Louis XIV. and Mademoiselle de la Vallière. He had been declared legitimate and created an Admiral of France. The realization of this rather premature proposal was frustrated by the death of the suggested bridegroom, which occurred in 1686, and for six years to come the selection of a substitute remained in abeyance. At length, in 1692, Madame de Maintenon, with her eye on Condé's two unmarried daughters, urged the Duc du Maine to seek the hand of one of them, for, after their eldest sister, Madame de Conti, they were the first princesses of the blood-royal. Madame la Duchesse,<sup>1</sup> their cousin, was jealous of them and used spitefully to

<sup>1</sup> Mademoiselle de Nantes, wife of M. le Duc Louis III.



call them "les poupées du sang." To choose between them was no simple matter, for they were pretty evenly matched as regards their lack of physical development, and neither one of them seemed inclined to grow any bigger.<sup>1</sup> The ladies themselves never had a say in the matter, princesses in those days being pretty much like victims arrayed for the sacrifice.

It will become evident, in the course of our narrative, that the part of the Duc du Maine in his wife's career was very largely a negative one. At the same time his own life was too closely bound up with hers to suffer us to omit some sort of epitome of his origin and childhood. Louis Auguste de Bourbon, who was born at Versailles on the 31st March 1670, was the son of Louis XIV. and Madame de Montespan. He had been declared legitimate three years later, and had received at the same time an appointment as Colonel of the Swiss Guards, a circumstance which caused, we may suppose, no great commotion in the regiment. The title of Duc du Maine was not a new one. It had already been borne by a member of the Guise family, who had met his death at Montauban in 1621. The Duchy of Maine and his first military appointment were but the forerunners of the innumerable favours that were destined to fall like rain upon the head of this noble prince whom La Fontaine used to nick-name "le fils de Jupiter."

Madame Scarron was entrusted with his education as well as with that of his natural sister, Mademoiselle de Nantes.<sup>2</sup> From that day all her energies, all her care,

<sup>1</sup> All three of them were remarkably small. The eldest was good-looking, and very clever and sensible; but the incredible severity with which M. le Prince treated every one over whom he wielded authority had produced in her an excessive timidity.

<sup>2</sup> The sight of these two children of adultery did not appear to scandalize Madame de Sévigné. In a letter she wrote in 1674 she says, "We have not seen the little princes yet. The eldest has been with his father and mother: he is pretty, but no one has seen him

were bestowed on the education of her adopted children. To the young prince she was a second mother, and one who was assuredly worthy of supplanting the first. The childhood of the Duc du Maine was not without its trials. "Nature," says Saint-Simon, "had given him a club-foot in a fit of temper," an affliction which always caused him to walk with a limp. One day Louis XIV., coming to visit Madame de Montespan, found Madame Scarron there. With one hand she was holding the Duc du Maine on her knee, and with the other rocking his little sister to sleep. The picture touched the royal heart, and was the first thing to turn the King's thoughts in the direction of the morganatic marriage. It is unquestionably a matter for astonishment that so strict a moralist as Madame de Maintenon should have conceived such an infatuation for the fruits of a double adultery; for the very existence of these children afforded an irrefutable demonstration of the vice that prevailed in the royal household. But this quasi-maternal affection completely carried her away. Her letters to the Abbé Gobelin<sup>1</sup> bear sufficient testimony to the unremitting solicitude with which she watched over her charges, particularly over the Duc du Maine, whose slight deformity seemed to claim her special care. In April 1674 Madame Scarron took him *incognito* to Antwerp to consult a celebrated physician of the Low Countries, and the following year he went with her to Barèges for the waters.<sup>2</sup> "The King," writes Madame de Sévigné, "was overjoyed to see him enter the room walking as if there were nothing the matter." The improvement was only transient; the limp remained. Madame Scarron, who found her pupil

yet" ("Lettres de Madame de Sévigné," Monmerqué's Edition, vol. iii. p. 345).

<sup>1</sup> 28th April 1675, "Lettres de Madame de Sévigné," Monmerqué's Edition, vol. iv. p. 183.

<sup>2</sup> Letter dated 11th November 1675.

“delightful company,”<sup>1</sup> bestowed exceptional care upon his religious education. She had a manual compiled for his special use, a compendium of rules on the duties of a prince, which was intended to give him a true understanding of the meaning of religion, and to constitute a brief and practical book of devotion for daily use.<sup>2</sup> From the maxims and rules therein inculcated, M. du Maine derived habits of devotion that never forsook him.

His mental capacities and his thirst for knowledge showed a remarkable development for a child of his age, and so proud of him did Madame de Maintenon become, that when he was fourteen she would have it that he was a veritable prodigy. She even went the length of having his name printed beneath translations which were her own handiwork, to such an extent did her affection get the better of her conscience. Not content with this she actually caused her pupil to be nominated for the great Corneille’s chair at the Academy, a proceeding whose only effect was to provoke a general smile.<sup>3</sup>

Seeing him so well endowed and so eager to learn,

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Maintenon to M. d’Aubigné at Belfast, 16th October 1675.

<sup>2</sup> Madame de Maintenon to the Abbé Gobelin, Versailles, 2nd June 1682.

<sup>3</sup> Madame de Sévigné’s letters of the 7th August 1676 and the 15th October 1677 (Sévigné to Madame Grignan): In 1685 the young Duc du Maine gives expression to his gratitude to Madame de Maintenon in the following letter (Maine to Maintenon, “Correspondance Maintenon,” vol. ii. p. 423, 1685): “I am very happy, Madame,” he writes, “to see that my reputation is not indifferent to you. Having a lady of your signal merit in whom I can confide, I trust it will never be possible for me to go astray, never at least while you continue to entertain the same feelings which you have ever displayed towards me hitherto, and of which your letter bears witness. So long as you are at hand to lead me I shall never be found lacking, for I know how you conceal my shortcomings, only making known that which is worthy in me. People are predisposed in my favour the moment they learn that it is to you that I owe my education. I do not aspire to sing your praises; that were too high a task for one of my years. I will merely add, to give a faint idea of what you are, that you gained the favour of the greatest sovereign in the world without losing the goodwill of any of his subjects, an achievement which envy seldom permits.

Louis XIV. had been anxious to further the development of his talents by giving him the best possible tutors. Thus for science he had selected "the learned M. Chevreau," who had converted the Princesse Palatine to the Catholic Faith, and had written a work entitled a "History of the World."<sup>1</sup> In the domain of literature his choice, prompted by the Duc de Montausier and the Bishop of Meaux, had lighted upon MM. de Malézieu and de Court.<sup>2</sup>

Malézieu, who enjoyed the regard of M. le Prince, M. le Duc and the Prince de Conti, was a learned man, and it was his destiny to play an important part in the life of the Duchesse du Maine. He was also a friend of Fénelon and Bossuet.

Before M. du Maine had attained the marriageable age, there had already been some idea of wedding him to the daughter of Monsieur, the princess who afterwards succeeded to the throne of Spain. But La Palatine, with her Teutonic stubbornness, had displayed opposition to a plan in which she apprehended the unwelcome influence of Madame de Maintenon. "If the old dame gets a finger in the pie," she coarsely exclaimed, "my son is done for."<sup>3</sup> The end of it was that the pseudo-Queen and the Abbé Dubois, who were jointly responsible

<sup>1</sup> "Éloges de Fontenelle," Nicolas de Malézieu.

<sup>2</sup> He was kind, religious and generous. His tutors were clever, capable men, and he swiftly made rapid progress in all branches of belles-lettres, ancient history and mathematics; a circumstance somewhat rare in one of his rank. He was good-looking and constitutionally strong, possessing together with an agreeable address an exceptional degree of clear-headedness.

<sup>3</sup> People say to Madame de Maintenon and Madame de Montespan "Mesdames, do not set your hearts upon the matter. If the marriage takes place, you will not long survive it" ("Correspondance de Madame," vol. i. p. 190). "I am told that the weddings of M. le Duc de Bourbon and of M. du Maine are both fixed for July" (Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Grignan, Les Rochers, 15th April 1685). Several ladies are excessively anxious to obtain appointments as "Ladies-in-waiting" (*id.*).

for the plan, found her hostility too strong for them, and were obliged to abandon the idea.<sup>1</sup> However, the all-powerful Maintenon was by no means so readily disposed to relinquish the projects she had formed for the advancement of her prince, for whom she had "a foster-mother's weakness." Perceiving that the young Louis Auguste could not become the son-in-law of the Duc d'Orléans, she concentrated all her endeavours on making him the son-in-law of M. le Prince, a scheme for which she found a serviceable ally in the vanity of Henri Jules. She urged the Duc du Maine to make up his mind between the two sisters Mademoiselle de Condé and Mademoiselle de Charolais. But the young prince had his reasons for hesitation. In the words of a witty writer "it seemed as though Chantilly had become the capital of Lilliput, and that these ladies were some of its pygmy inhabitants."<sup>2</sup> He considered himself entitled to stand on his dignity, for, quite apart from his birth, he was a most desirable match. He enjoyed the revenues of several principalities, and, in 1692, was already the bearer of a host of titles. He was Duc du Maine and d'Aumale, Comte d'Eu, Peer of France, Ruler of Dombes, and Knight of the Orders of the King.

Still, notwithstanding all these advantages—his rank at Court and his sterling education—his retiring disposition, which imparted a degree of sombreness and austerity to his behaviour, was calculated to diminish his popularity in society. He was frequently made the butt of satires and lampoons. Thus, in 1685, when he was not more than fifteen years of age, Madame de Thianges presented him with what purported to be a New Year's gift, but which was, in fact, nothing but an ill-natured jest at his expense. Since that date the satirists had shown themselves unsparing, though their thrusts were borne meekly enough by their victim. He knew that he had friends on his side, and, moreover, his qualities

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.

<sup>2</sup> Madame Arvède Barine.

were not of the militant order. In 1692 it would not have been easy to point to a young man of greater distinction or of more agreeable appearance. He possessed a refined, oval countenance, which recalled alike the beauty of his mother and the majestic demeanour of his royal father, Louis XIV. The slight limp from which he suffered scarcely affected the elegance of his gait, and "he bore himself, in every circumstance, like the princes of the blood."<sup>1</sup> From his mother, he inherited that animation of manner which people were wont to call "the spirit of the Mortemarts."

As for Madame de Maintenon, she would have it that he was nothing short of a hero. "He is," she used to say, "a young warrior of twenty-two, very reckless, erratic and unheeding; but with these exceptions, a man of merit."<sup>2</sup> "The warrior," though not exactly a thunderbolt of war, had done his duty on campaign. The offshoots of the royal house, even those of irregular birth, rarely failed to display this attribute of the Bourbons, witness the Duc de Vendôme.

Madame de Montespan had early encouraged her son to follow a martial career. In 1681 we find her writing to him in the following terms<sup>3</sup>:—

Were it mine to experience any feeling of joy, how happy I should have been to see the manner in which the King welcomed your proposal to proceed to the war! He was so pleased that he told every one about it, and I am confident that, had you been here, he would have taken you with him. As for myself, to whom your reputation is above all things dear, I should have felt no sorrow at seeing you set out on

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon. See the portrait in the Versailles Museum, No. 3623 (Antoine Dieu, 1697. It has been engraved by Edelin R. and by Antoine Masson).

<sup>2</sup> Madame de La Fayette, "Mémoires de la Cour de France."

<sup>3</sup> Madame de Montespan to the Duc du Maine, Fontainebleau, 28th September 1681, see Lavallée, "Correspondance Maintenon," vol. ii. p. 210.

an expedition, fraught though it were with so many risks to your health, for I should have had the joy of hearing you praised on every hand and of seeing you do that which would afford proof that you possessed the courage and the ambition that might be looked for in the son of a hero. I make no mention of the other sources whence you might derive such sentiments; it is well, however, for you to know that you have been happily preserved from those warring characteristics that are the ordinary birthright of those of similar descent to your own.

In 1688 M. du Maine had distinguished himself as a volunteer for special service at the siege of Philippsburg. "Monseigneur," says Dangeau, "went, that night, to see M. du Maine. While he was in the trenches, a cannon-ball struck the parapet and covered him with earth."<sup>1</sup> At Fleurus, in 1690, he had seen M. de Jussac perish at his side, while he himself had a horse killed under him.<sup>2</sup> He had been present at the siege of Mons, where he had displayed a conscientious assiduity in the discharge of his military duties. His letters to Madame de Maintenon were in a very cheerful strain. One of them he concluded as follows: "Farewell, Madame, I shall never forget that the King has made me a Prince, and that you have made me an honourable man."<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand there is no doubt that the King was responsible for the fact that few opportunities were vouchsafed to the Duc du Maine to distinguish himself in the field. His Majesty was unwilling for his son's life to be jeopardized. "Let him see everything," he wrote to the Maréchal d'Humières, "but, if you can avoid it, never allow him to run any risks."<sup>4</sup> And the young prince lamented that they never allotted him

<sup>1</sup> "Dangeau," vol. iv. p. 160.

<sup>2</sup> "Memoirs of La Fare" (Collection Michaud et Poujoulat), vol. xxxii. p. 296.

<sup>3</sup> From the Camp at Picton, 3rd May 1689. D. G.

<sup>4</sup> "Œuvres de Louis XIV.," vol. vi. p. 14.

a post of any danger. To his former governess he wrote <sup>1</sup> :—

I confess, Madame, that I am consumed with impatience to find out whether I possess the qualities of my forefathers ; and in another letter, he gave a further example of his good sense :

Although I am not doing much here,<sup>2</sup> I am doing more than I should be at Court, where I am always hobbling about in front of people whom I contrive to annoy. But here I am learning my business. . . .

M. du Maine seemed pleased at being on campaign with the King, as his letter from the camp at Halle <sup>3</sup> most satisfactorily testifies. "Of course you know that M. de Luxembourg does wonders for me and I for him ; and you would never imagine how pleased my father is with me. How easy it is for the great to give pleasure. Just these simple words, 'I am pleased with you,' have touched me more than the whole host of appointments

<sup>1</sup> From the Camp at Estines, 15th August 1689. Madame de Sévigné to the Comte de Bussy-Rabutin, Les Rochers, 12th July 1690 ("Lettres de Sévigné," vol. ix. p. 545' : "I want to write to you, mon cousin, about the battle that Monsieur de Luxembourg has won. . . . These great events always create a deep impression among those who are concerned, or who fear they may be concerned in them. I am very grieved at poor Jussac's death. Madame de Montespan compelled him to come to the court and then to go on to the war, where, with a prince who takes so eagerly to his duties and finds no situation too hot for him, it appears he was not to make old bones" (Maine). The Duc du Maine charged at the head of a squadron of gendarmerie against a hostile squadron in front of him. They broke its formation and put it to rout. However, he was exposed to a raking fire from the enemy's infantry and it was on this occasion that the Comte de Jussac, the first gentleman of his chamber, the Marquis de Villarceaux, the Chevalier de Sazecourt . . . met their death ("Gazette," 20th July, pp. 359 and 360). The Duc du Maine, General of Cavalry, repeatedly led his squadrons in the charge, fought hand to hand amidst the enemy, had his horse shot under him, and gave proof of exceptional gallantry ("Gazette" 8th July 1690).

<sup>2</sup> In camp with the army serving in Flanders (1689).

<sup>3</sup> 1st June 1691.



he has conferred upon me." There, at all events, speaks a true heart and a loyal son. As for his military talents, Saint-Simon will not allow that he had any. His violent prejudice and the intense dislike he entertained towards the Duc du Maine even impel him to go so far as to tax him with cowardice. But it is invariably a delicate matter to weigh a soldier's bravery in the balance, more particularly when the soldier happens to be a prince. When there are two sides to the question, it is surely wiser to withhold one's decision and to refrain from pronouncing so hasty a judgment as Saint-Simon's.<sup>1</sup> The Duc du Maine, as we shall see, lacked character, but with regard to courage, that of a soldier and that of a citizen are different things. Bravery the Duc du Maine never lacked; but he was deficient in the power of taking in a situation at a glance, as well as in campaigning experience; hence the following significant passage in a letter written by Madame de Maintenon in 1691: "The King was not pleased with the part which the Maréchal de Luxembourg made our prince play in the last engagement. Things will go better for him in the next campaign."<sup>2</sup> They never went very well because M. du Maine was not intended for a soldier.

The foundress of Saint-Cyr had nurtured him according to an ideal of her own. He had "aims and ambitions,"<sup>3</sup> he spoke with polish, he was charming in his own domestic circle, upright, religious, and good-hearted; but he had no steadfastness of purpose. His hesitancy and lack of self-confidence frequently led him to incur the charge of hypocrisy. Educated as he had been so near the throne, he was imbued with all the prejudices which were the birthright of the class into which he had been

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon, "Memoirs," vol. ii. p. 316-323; x. 194-195; xii. 212; xiii. 392. Régnier's Edition.

<sup>2</sup> Maintenon to Madame de Rochechouart, Fontainebleau, 27th September 1691.

<sup>3</sup> Duc de Noailles, "Madame de Maintenon," vol. iv. p. 281.

born, and this notwithstanding the irregularity of his own descent.<sup>1</sup> Beneath his grand air of modesty and indifference, he concealed some sterling qualities. Madame de Maintenon used to make excuses for his reserve by saying: "He is too good ever to make a noise in the world." He was indeed an upright man whose whole life was to be one of moral suffering. As for the obloquy which Saint-Simon has heaped upon him, it is dissipated by a host of proofs, notably by his literary remains.

The Duc du Maine is the author of seventy-one maxims which, if they do not indicate force and virility, at all events display his loftiness of soul. Here are some of them, chosen at hap-hazard; they denote at once the man of intellect and the man of faith. Perchance La Rochefoucauld himself would not have disdained to avow their authorship. "We very commonly find fault with those whom we feel incapable of imitating." "One of the best means of preserving our humility is to feel ourselves liable to all the evils which overtake our neighbours." "One cannot too soon grow used to righteousness nor have too strong a desire to become an upright man." It would be easy to multiply quotations, all to the honour of the prince as a scholar and a Christian.

Such, then, was the worthy man who was destined by M. le Prince and Madame de Maintenon to wed the little Princess Louise Bénédicte, who was then still playing with her dolls at Chantilly. A determining factor in bringing to pass this precocious union was possibly the idea by which Louis XIV. was secretly obsessed, whereby he hoped to bring about a fusion between his illegitimate children and his royal race. By mingling their separate interests and, later on, by proclaiming the right of the legitimated princes to succeed to the Crown, the King flattered himself that he would be eliminating all possibility of rivalry between his natural offspring and

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, "Causeries de Lundi."

the lawful princes of the blood. But, despite these secret projects, Louis XIV. was by no means so eager as Madame de Maintenon to bring about the match, feeling that the Duc du Maine was an unfortunate subject with his lameness and his habit of awakening the jealousy of others (his enemies were already in the habit of referring to him as "this pedant," "this hobbler"). But the King was also visited by qualms lest his son's irregular origin should render it impolitic to mate him with a princess proper. It was as though he foresaw, in sombre vision, all the wranglings, all the conflicts, that might ensue for the monarchy from a representative of such dubious lineage as that of the legitimated princes. The royal sire even went the length of impressing upon his son that it was not for people of his kind to found a line; and when Madame de Maintenon insisted he would retort sharply, "People like that ought not to marry." Sometimes he would aver that he would rather M. du Maine married anybody save a princess. Like the woodman tending his trees the great King, in such moments of illumination, thought rather of pruning away the parasitic branches than of causing them to bear fruit. Well had it been if, later on, the feebleness of old age had not prompted him to adopt a different resolution.

This undecided state of affairs sometimes worried Madame de Maintenon not a little, and her state of mind is betrayed in the following extract from a letter she wrote to the Abbess of Fontevrault: "The Duc du Maine is anxious to marry and they do not know whom to give him for a wife. The King is inclined to favour a lady of private station rather than a foreign princess. The daughters of M. le Prince are dwarfs. . . . Do you know of any others?"

Rumours of an approaching match between the young prince and Mademoiselle de Charolais began to go the round. People were sick of foreign princesses. Still,

public opinion, which is often the best of matrimonial agents, occasionally excites opposition. In this case an opponent was found in the person of Mademoiselle de Montpensier, "la Grande Mademoiselle," as she was called. Old, venomous, and sarcastic, she bore Louise Bénédicte a grudge for a piece of thoughtless frolic at her expense, and went about telling everyone that if Condé's grand-daughter married Madame de Montespan's son it would indeed be a lovely match—"the game-legged united to the one-armed"—a malicious saying which all but ruined the arrangements. But M. le Prince and Madame de Maintenon insisted. It had to be gone through with. The Duc du Maine decided to fix his choice on the younger of the two sisters, whom he found the more attractive. We may wonder whether the young prince had any inkling of the sort of wasps' nest into which he was thrusting himself.

However, to cut a long story short, the sarcasms of Mademoiselle de Montpensier had no more effect than the jealous animosities of La Palatine, that corpulent, ungainly, and vindictive German frau, who fumed and raged because she foresaw that the advancement of the Condés would involve a set-back to the Orleans. In spite of them all, everything turned out as well as could be for the junior branch of the House of Bourbon. Although Mademoiselle de Condé, who had received the go-by,<sup>1</sup> bore her anguish with apparent calmness, her jealousy was none the less profound. Her health began to suffer; she drooped, fell into a decline, and died, a disconsolate maiden, in 1699.<sup>2</sup> And had she no

<sup>1</sup> Of whose cleverness, virtues, and merit people told wonders ("Additions au journal de Saint-Simon," Dangeau, vol. xii. p. 372; "Mémoires," vol. vi., edition of 1873).

<sup>2</sup> She bore it (her disappointment) with constancy, wisdom, and dignity, and people had nothing but admiration for her behaviour. But the effort cost her dear. It undermined her health which began to decline from that day onwards.—Saint-Simon, "Mémoires" (1692).



ANNE MARIE LOUISE D'ORLÉANS, DUCHESSE  
DE MONTPENSIER  
*From the Enamel by Petitot in the South Kensington  
Museum*



justification for her grief? Had not her youngest sister won from her the son of the Roi-Soleil, the son who might perchance, one day, be called upon to fill the throne of France? We ask ourselves whether Mademoiselle de Charolais had done aught of her own accord to bring about her triumph. The chronicles of her time are silent on the point, but we may take it that she had not even been consulted in the matter.

Be that as it may, it is possible that this piece of heart-pilfering would have awakened no scruples in the bosom of Mademoiselle de Charolais who already showed signs of that want of consideration for others which was to mark her subsequent career. For the rest, it cannot be maintained that the betrothed were a particularly compatible pair. The gentle calmness and timid moderation of the bridegroom found but little response in the quick, keen, restless nature of his tiny, almost Lilliputian bride. Practically the only thing they had in common was their love of study and of belles-lettres. Whatever opinion we may entertain concerning the wisdom of the Duc du Maine's selection, Louis XIV., who was consulted by Madame de Maintenon, declared himself a supporter of his son's opinion. Henceforth this earth-shaking ruler was to do all that in him lay in order to multiply favours and prerogatives for the benefit of his illegitimate children. Whatever the fate of the Monarchy, he thought of nothing but of heaping privilege on privilege upon the parasitic branch of his family, and, instead of one, it was a double alliance of this kind, which, in his sovereign authority, he ordained should be brought to pass. One fine day, we find Bussy writing to the Abbé de Choisy to tell him that "the Duc de Chartres was marrying Mademoiselle de Blois, and M. du Maine, Mademoiselle de Charolais." And thus it came about that the scutcheons of the Houses of Orleans and Bourbon-Condé were both adorned with a bar-sinister. Incensed at these marriages,

which were calculated to revolt her royal pride, Mademoiselle de Montpensier refused to be present at either of them.

On the 13th February 1692, Louis XIV., "at one in his choice with M. le Prince," came from Marly to Versailles to pay a visit to Madame la Princesse and formally to make request to her, in her own abode, for the hand of her third daughter, on behalf of the Duc du Maine.<sup>1</sup> Puffed-up with pride, Henri Jules received His Majesty at the foot of the great staircase of the Hôtel de Condé. At that moment Louise Bénédicte could not dissemble her delight and laughed at whatever people might say about a "lame" match. Her suitor had a handsome face. What else was lacking to satisfy the vanity of this maiden in her teens? How many girls are there who never look for more in their lovers than that? Moreover, was she not now her own mistress? That was the main consideration in the eyes of a young girl in love with freedom, who had sought in vain for happiness in the society of a tyrannical father and a downtrodden mother.

Mischievous as ever, Madame la Duchesse,<sup>2</sup> the daughter-in-law of M. le Prince, became still more witty with her husband, Louis III de Bourbon-Condé, concerning "the little hop o' my thumb" who was to become the Duchesse du Maine. The King en route for Compiègne, halted at Chantilly, and towards the close of Lent the betrothal took place in His Majesty's private apartment. At Trianon there was a banquet for eighty guests in honour of the event.

The marriage-contract was signed at Versailles.<sup>3</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> The eldest, Marie Thérèse, known as Mademoiselle de Bourbon, had married, in 1688, François Louis de Conti, Prince de La Roche-sur-Yon. The second was Anne Marie Victoire, called Mademoiselle de Condé, who was born in 1675.

<sup>2</sup> Mademoiselle de Nantes.

<sup>3</sup> "Dangeau," vol. iv. p. 46-47; "Gazette," p. 143-144. See "L'analyse du contrat" par M. de Boislisle, note sur Saint-Simon, vol. i. p.



dowry of Mademoiselle de Charolais amounted to eight hundred thousand livres. The King gave his son a million in cash.<sup>1</sup>

On the 19th March, the nuptials were celebrated amid circumstances of great pomp, by Cardinal de Bouillon in the Chapel Royal. Magnificent fêtes were given in honour of the occasion. At the wedding-feast the King appeared in his robes of state.<sup>2</sup> It seemed as though an affront were offered to public morality, and people remarked on the difference between all this display and the simplicity which had characterized the marriage of the Prince de Conti and Mademoiselle de Bourbon, when no banquet and no fêtes had been held. Hence jealousies, manifold and profound, in the House of Condé! On the night of the du Maine banquet, after the reception, the King of England, who was then residing at Saint Germain, "presented the chemise" to the bride and bridegroom. Madame de Montespan, who was falling ever deeper and deeper into disfavour, did not appear at any of the functions and took no part in the signing of the contract. The next day, the Duchess, in her bed of state, received the whole Court, the Duchesse d'Harcourt performing the honours. Madame de Saint-Vallery was appointed Lady-in-Waiting to Madame du Maine, but it was not long ere she had to relinquish her duties and retire from the Court.

Monsieur de Montchevreuil, the former tutor of Monsieur du Maine, was made a Gentleman of the Bedchamber. Everyone was asking questions and exchanging prophecies

102. Texte aux A. E. France, 144, fol. 278. For the dowry, see A. N. O.<sup>1</sup>, 36, fol. lxxvii. (Addition de Saint-Simon, p. 20). Letter of Madame de Sévigné (15th April 1685).

<sup>1</sup> "In honour of the relationship which the contracting parties bore to the King in blood and lineage." So runs the text of the contract.

<sup>2</sup> The King commanded the wedding party and the whole Court to Trianon where there was a reception and supper for the ladies followed by a sort of lottery, called a "blanque."

regarding the future of the bride who was still but a school-girl. Was she to be entirely in the hands of Madame de Maintenon? While everyone was shrewdly asking this question, the King's consort put the matter beyond doubt by taking the young woman under her protection.

God grant, she wrote on the 22nd March 1692,<sup>1</sup> to Madame de Brinon, her substitute at Saint-Cyr, God grant that everyone may be as pleased with her as I now am. I was told that she would be spending Holy-Week at Maubuisson.<sup>2</sup> Let her have plenty of rest. They are killing her here with the restraints and fatigues of Court routine. She is crushed to death under a mass of gold and jewellery, and her head-dress weighs more than she does. They will not let her grow and keep her health. She scarcely eats at all, I don't think she sleeps enough, and I am afraid of my life that she has been married too young. She looks prettier with nothing on her head than in all their elaborate finery. I should like to keep her at Saint-Cyr, dressed like one of the "Vertes," and rushing about as joyfully as *they* do in the gardens. There are no austerities like those imposed by Society.<sup>3</sup>

Sage reflections, doubtless. Why, then, had Madame de Maintenon toiled with so much insistence to bring about this marriage for a young princess who neither ate, slept, nor grew? Grow indeed! She grew no more after her marriage; and as for sleeping, we shall see how she loved to stay up o' nights. With regard to eating, she never cared overmuch for the pleasures of the table, a fact which her guests came to complain of later on.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Lettres historiques de Madame de Maintenon," vol. i. p. 209.

<sup>2</sup> An Abbey, near Pontoise.

<sup>3</sup> "M. du Maine's marriage brought about a rupture between Madame la Princesse and her sister, the Duchesse de Hanovre, who had been very anxious to secure M. du Maine for one of her daughters and who contended that she had been unfairly ousted by M. le Prince" (Saint-Simon, 1693). Later on she withdrew to Germany with her daughters.

<sup>4</sup> Madame de Sévigné does not seem to have attached much importance to this marriage. On the 12th April 1692 ("Letters," vol. x. p. 77), she writes to Bussy: "I say no more to you about the marriage of M. du Maine and Mlle. de Charolais. After that of M. de Chartres nothing is worthy of our attention."

The portraits of the Duchesse du Maine, in her young days, represent her as a highly-dressed personage with little enough of that expressiveness of countenance which her contemporaries describe. There are two portraits of her at Versailles, one a magnificent work executed by Mignard in his later years, in which we behold a little baby princess blowing soap-bubbles. The other depicts a young woman with a string of pearls in her hand. She has a pretty face, and a bright complexion. She wears a magnificent court dress, and carries, on her head, a huge Louis XIV. coiffure, the extraordinary height of which seems to have been designed by the artist to divert attention from the smallness of her stature, which, however, his flattering brush has rendered hardly noticeable. The features of the Duchess are also reproduced in a pretty medallion portrait in the Condé museum. These three paintings all convey the idea of a dainty and attractively elegant little woman, very tastefully attired. But all the portraits of the day are taken up with the elaborate costumes of the seventeenth century, and the likenesses practically disappear in a kind of indeterminate uniformity of feature. How seldom do they show us any physiognomy in the faces, how seldom do they portray that expression which reveals the soul within? We ply them in vain for an answer to our questionings. We gaze at them, and in the perfection of their elegance they speak to us only of sumptuous attire and of dazzling jewels; no more. Numerous engravings also are supposed to have preserved for us the delicate features of the little duchess.<sup>1</sup> But, to be genuine, they should betray a closer resemblance among themselves. Of all these reproductions, there is a simple miniature, an enchanting water-colour, which is said to be the finest likeness. It is to be seen at the present Château de Sceaux.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> At the Cabinet des Estampes in The Bibliothèque Nationale.

<sup>2</sup> The property of Madame la Marquise de Trévisé.

## CHAPTER II

Early married life—Character of the Duchesse du Maine—Her virtue greater than her piety—First clouds—Fresh campaigns of the Duc du Maine (1692-1702)—The dawn of ambition—The intermediate rank—The Duchesse du Maine and the philosophers—She grows weary of the Court—Her Italian motto—At Clagny (1694).

**N**OTWITHSTANDING the fact that she was still almost a child; despite, too, the stigma attaching to her husband's birth, Madame du Maine was compelled by the etiquette of the Court to play her little part among "les poupées du sang," joining in their games, taking part in their gatherings, wherein she was assigned her appointed place. But whether it was due to disdain or to jealousy, the alliance had not proved popular with her sisters and sisters-in-law, and they were not invariably disposed to make themselves agreeable; indeed, they kept the little Duchess at arm's length, and this caused her great mortification. Still, she always had an answer for their slighting observations and could ride the high horse with the best of them. The good-hearted Madame de Maintenon was much concerned when she learned of the discord which her match-making efforts had introduced into the Condé family.

I cannot believe, she wrote from Saint-Cyr,<sup>1</sup> that there should be any great difficulty about getting the princesses to settle down together. . . . I am very pleased with Madame la Duchesse du Maine. If she puts her intentions into execu-

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Madame de Maintenon to Madame de Brinon, 9th September, 1693.

tion she will be worth more, little though she is, than all the rest of them put together. You know that it is not their care, their deference, their attentions that I desire. All I ask is that a woman should be true and good. I would have her pleasing in the sight of God, her King, her husband, and all good people. But that requires the exercise of will and of self-restraint.

Such was Madame de Maintenon's idea of the perfect princess. It was a standard which the little Duchess was far from attaining. To begin with, self-restraint was a discipline which, of all others, it was least within her power to exercise. Her wayward, despotic disposition was beginning to show itself more and more. That no stain besmirched her youthful virtue is primarily due to her possessing, at all events some of the qualities of a good wife, and, secondly, to the fact that her charms were not so seductive as to become for her a source of serious danger. As for her devotional habits, they were soon to be whelmed in a flood of worldly pleasures, and it is Madame de Maintenon once more who tells us about the matter. In a letter to Madame de Brinon she says :—

There is someone I wish to talk to you about, and that is Madame la Duchesse du Maine. You led me astray with regard to her in the most important particular of all, namely, her piety. She has no inclinations whatever in that direction, and only wishes to behave like the rest. I should hardly venture to speak to a young woman trained by one who is Virtue itself. It is not that I wish to make a milksop of her, but I must confess I should have liked her to show some steadiness, to follow some rule of conduct that would have rendered her pleasing to God, to the King and to Monsieur du Maine, her husband, who is sensible enough to wish his wife to be different from some others that we know of. I had given her a saintly woman as lady-in-waiting, but she, it appears, has but little influence over her and merely follows her mistress's bidding. She is but a child, and it is really a governess rather than a lady-in-waiting that she needs. In other respects your description was a true one. She is pretty, amiable, light-hearted, and witty, and, most important of all, fond of her

husband who, on his side, is passionately attached to her, and, rather than cause her the slightest pain, would give way to her in everything. If she, too, disappoints me, I shall trouble myself no more, but shall come to the conclusion that it is impossible for the King to find anyone in the family who will turn out well. I confess I should like to love the Duchesse du Maine more than all seeing the relationship she bears to the man whom I love so dearly.

There we have Madame de Maintenon with her illusions pretty thoroughly destroyed! She certainly displayed some severity in requiring a young wife of seventeen—for she has now been married a year—to shut her ears to every appeal of gallantry and worldly distraction out of respect for the pious admonitions she had received from a saintly and estimable mother. The Duchess considered her husband's religious exercises excessive, and there existed between them no common interest powerful enough to outweigh, in her mind, the attractive dissipations of the Court. "If Love is a deceiver," says Fontenelle, "he is doubly so when he sets up house."<sup>1</sup> What then was to be said of a love which perhaps was as transitory as a wisp of burning straw, and merely a fond illusion of Madame de Maintenon's?

The apprehensions of the erstwhile foundress of Saint Cyr did not fail to strike the young man also, for his experience of life and of the sort of world in which he moved had matured his judgment and uplifted his ideas above the level of the Court. Above all, he knew how to pray for his wife. It must not be imagined, however, that Madame du Maine had any dislike to religious observances, or that she was visited with fits of unbelief. It was that her childhood had been passed amid surroundings of such rigorous repression at Chantilly or in the Hôtel de Condé that, now, her desire for relaxation and pleasure swept

<sup>1</sup> Fontenelle's "Lettres galantes," Letter XLII., to M. d'O. . . .

everything before it. It stifled every germ of true religion, the place of which was, later on, to be taken by a sort of vague religious dilettanteism. The people about her, when they saw how wayward, how whimsical she was, and how petulant she would grow the moment her desires or her caprices were thwarted, bethought themselves with horror of her father's fitful insanity and forbore to cross her, for she seemed to be threatened in a greater degree than any of his other daughters with the direful heritage of his terrible outbursts of fury. Thenceforward there was an end to all let or hindrance, and she plunged wildly into the whirlpool of social gaieties. Her success was swift, thanks to the Attic qualities of her repartee and the ever-growing culture of her quick and eager intellect. All this was entirely opposed to the tastes of Monsieur du Maine whose serious and reflective nature used to be pained at the lack of reticence—and occasionally of decorum—which characterized the ladies' drawing-room conversations. More than once the King was obliged to interfere to put a stop to some impropriety of speech on the part of our headstrong young lady, who carried on a tournament of wit with her sister-in-law, Madame la Duchesse, whose tongue was as clever and even less under control than her own.

But was this twenty-two year old husband so much in love with his wife as his foster-mother used to affirm? Though we have little documentary evidence bearing on this early period of their married life, we may legitimately entertain some doubts about the matter. A circumstance which seems in a special degree to be symptomatic of conjugal disagreement is to be found in the hurried departure of the Duc du Maine for the seat of war, when he was universally known to have such little inclination for campaigning. It may well have been some early and painful misunderstandings that sent him away, the very year of his marriage, to the war in Flanders, there to

remain for all the subsequent campaigns. We learn from Saint-Simon's revelations with what harshness he was reminded by his young wife of the honour she had done him by marrying him, and thus conferring upon him the distinction of becoming the consort of a princess of the blood. But whatever it was that sent him, off he went to the war again, far from Chantilly, far from the Duchess whom he left to disport herself to her heart's content amid the brilliant gaieties of Versailles. It is a matter for regret that no traces are to be found of the letters that passed between husband and wife during these prolonged absences; they might have been rich in evidence of the affinities or antipathies that existed between them.

On the 3rd April 1692, the King conferred a fresh honour on him, and made him a Lieutenant-General, and so we see him setting out to win his spurs. He takes part, according to his high rank, in the siege of Namur, acquits himself very worthily at the battle of Steinkerck, and, a year later, cuts a creditable figure with the Moselle division, in which he was given the command of a newly formed *corps de carabiniers*. In Flanders he was treated by Maréchal de Boufflers—who was more of a courtier than de Luxembourg—with all the deference due to a royal prince.

I regard it, writes de Boufflers to the King, as a very great honour to myself, and as a very special favour of Your Majesty, that you should have been so good as to place me with Monseigneur le Duc du Maine.<sup>1</sup>

The Dauphin was with the army, and the Duc du Maine worked in conjunction with him, supporting him to the best of his abilities. He was in command of the cavalry in Flanders, and the King afterwards allotted him a similar post in the army serving in Germany.

<sup>1</sup> Maréchal de Boufflers to the King, from the Camp at Vaux (Flanders), 30th May 1693.



In 1694 and 1695 we find the Duc du Maine still in Flanders in charge of the left wing of Villeroi's army. We may assume that he performed his duties in a manner that did him honour, for later on Villeroi was to prove one of his staunchest and most ardent supporters. Nevertheless he had an unlucky day—in warfare who has not?—and was violently accused of dilatory conduct on the 14th July 1695, and of having thus been the means of allowing the Prince de Vaudemont, one of the Prince of Orange's supporters in Flanders, to slip through his fingers. Saint-Simon is particularly hard on the Duc du Maine in connection with this matter.

Monsieur du Maine, he writes, first of all wanted to carry out a reconnaissance, then to make his confession, and lastly, to get his men ready for action, though they had been ready a long while and were burning to begin the fight. Amid all these delays, Vaudemont succeeded in getting clear away, to the huge disgust of all the generals in the army. A few days after the occurrence, Monsieur d'Elbœuf went up to the Duc and said to him in the hearing of everyone, "Where do you expect to be serving in the next campaign, Monseigneur, because, wherever it may be, I should like to serve there too." "What do you mean?" asked the Prince. "I mean," came the reply, "that with you in command, a man need never be afraid of losing his life."

According to Saint-Simon, the Duc du Maine hung his head and made no answer. But with regard to this story, the evidence of the virulent Saint-Simon as well as that of the Dutch gazettes is not to be accepted without great reserve. In spite of the lampooners the Duc du Maine made good his case before the King, throwing the responsibilities for the affair on superior orders, to the perilous nature of which he had drawn attention in vain.<sup>1</sup>

On the 30th August following, during the engagement

<sup>1</sup> *Recueil des chansons historiques*

"Un bastard autrefois a sauvé le royaume  
Un bastard aujourd'hui sauve le roi Guillaume."

at Bonnet, this alleged coward had a second horse killed under him, which proves that he was in the thick of the fight. His last campaign was in 1702, which year saw him again in Flanders serving under the Duc de Bourgogne. After acquitting himself very favourably at Nimeguen on the 11th June he returned his sword to the scabbard for good. It must be confessed that from the point of view of his military reputation this was a premature retirement, for he was then only thirty-two and his friends were disappointed at not seeing him engaged on fresh fields during the protracted and arduous wars of the Spanish Succession. However, he had done himself justice and, after all, it was duty alone and no other motive that had prompted him to take the field. It must be added that he had not those special talents of which he would have been in need in order to fill effectively the high commands to which his rank entitled him. He continued to discharge his duties as Grand-Master of Artillery, but he had other ends in view, for he was not devoid of ambition. The King was never weary of heaping favours on him, and he was already immensely rich. What, then, did he lack? The rank of prince of the blood to which the Duchess had been urging him to lay his claim!

As far back as 1694, he had begun to put forward his case. The Duc de Vendôme, another illegitimate son of the King, had just suffered a rather mortifying reverse in a question of precedence. He told the Duc du Maine about the matter, who, notwithstanding the honours of which he was the recipient, "felt the insecurity of his position."<sup>1</sup>

Madame du Maine also employed every artifice which her subtlety could devise to prevail on Louis XIV. to grant the promotion on which she had set her heart. The

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon: Madame de Montespan used to indulge the young "ménage" at this period. A bed costing 40,000 écus to M. du Maine and pearls for Madame la Duchesse.

idea was to obtain the formal registration of letters-patent, assigning to the Duc a certain specified rank. To this desire the King acceded and consented to create for his son's benefit "an intermediate rank such as would not give umbrage to the lawful princes of the blood." Monsieur du Maine was thus accorded a position above the peers.

Monsieur le Duc and Monsieur le Prince de Condé<sup>1</sup> introduced the Duc du Maine before Parliament formally to make his application. On the 5th May 1694 he arrived at Versailles, proceeded to the Hôtel de Condé,<sup>2</sup> and entered the carriage of Monsieur le Duc accompanied by the Prince de Conti and the Comte de Toulouse,<sup>3</sup> his younger brother. They made their applications on two successive days in full state and attended by a numerous retinue. They were also present at Parliament in similar state on the 8th May, on which day the letters-patent of Monsieur du Maine were registered. In accordance therewith that prince, who was received in his quality of Count and Peer of Eu, was assigned a place in conformity with his new rank. In a visit of ceremony paid by the Venetian Ambassador to the two legitimated princes, they were treated by that personage as princes of the blood-royal. The intermediate rank was a decidedly satisfactory position. Monsieur du Maine displayed his contentment with the distinction, as well as his admiration for the cleverness Président du Harlay had shown in devising a compromise which would assure him the uninterrupted enjoyment of his prerogatives.

<sup>1</sup> Prince de La Roche-sur-Yon, nephew of Louis XIV.

<sup>2</sup> The site is now occupied by the Rue des Réservoirs.

<sup>3</sup> Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, Comte de Toulouse, third legitimated son of Louis XIV., born at Versailles, 6th June 1678. Created Admiral of France at the age of five. Prior to serving in the fleet, he accompanied the King in 1690 to the siege of Mons and Namur, where he displayed such bravery that his father was obliged to forbid him to expose himself so recklessly.

But the Duchess was more difficult to please, and did not regard this half-measure as sufficient for her dignity. In her view, the only effect of this intermediate rank was to emphasise in the eyes of the public the inferiority of the illegitimate branch. She thereupon began to make herself unpleasant at Court, and withdrew her presence from the grand receptions at Versailles ; what contributed the more to this course of conduct was, if we are to believe Saint-Simon, the fact that in a fit of mischievous madness, her father had inspired her with a great dread of her husband's jealousy.

She lived for some time amid her books, surrounded by learned men and philosophers such as Malézieu and La Bruyère. It was during this retirement that she developed her already wide acquaintance with science and literature, and perfected her remarkable memory. Amid this semi-isolation she conceived those ideas of greatness which were secretly to obsess her imagination for a long while to come ; only, however, to show themselves openly after a lapse of twenty years. But her capricious, restless spirit soon grew weary of such loneliness, and she went back to the Court once more and appeared again at all the functions, where her behaviour was characterised by an exuberance that had rather dropped out of fashion now that the King was growing old. She began to throw her money about broadcast, and it was not long ere the Duc was compelled to recognise that his "poupée" was largely endowed with the qualities of the Evil One. Her husband's expostulations and her father's reproofs she treated with equal contempt. Like a steed broken loose from the halter, she was as impatient of her mother's salutary example as she was of Madame de Maintenon's precepts. Recognising her as incorrigible they let her alone. She profited by her independence to bring her husband beneath her yoke. Many and many a time he was observed going sheepishly to the King to confide in him his domestic

troubles, and to draw a harrowing picture of the fearful scenes he was obliged to put up with at home.

But Louis, when he got to know about his daughter-in-law's "carryings-on," showed no inclination to meddle with such a fiery little body. He merely bestowed on his son some prudent admonitions, particularly on the score of his wife's reckless and ruinous expenditure.

Perceiving at length, says Madame de Caylus, that what he said merely increased his son's mental sufferings, without having any beneficial results, he decided to hold his peace and let him welter in the consequences of his own blind folly.

Howbeit, Court life, with all the remorseless requirements of etiquette from which there was no escape, rapidly became unbearable to the young Duchess. She craved for less monotony, for something more piquant, more alluring in her daily occupations and amusements. The life at Versailles and Marly was slavery to her, and she grew unutterably weary of it. Her own quarters were more often than not destitute of society, for her husband passed the greater part of his time on campaign, and so strict was the ceremonial of the Court that she could scarcely open her mouth or stir a yard without her august father-in-law's consent. But she had not endured all the trials and hardships of her childhood's years in her father's house merely to hamper herself with similar shackles now. She soon emancipated herself from all the trammels of rank, and more particularly from the protracted devotional exercises that Madame de Maintenon had devised for her. If the royal favourite flattered herself that she still held her in her net, she was cheating herself with the vain remnants of a dream. Soon Madame du Maine decided to make it plain that she was quite independent of everyone in the Condé family, and warned her sisters-in-law to keep their distance. In order that people might labour under

no misapprehension as to her readiness to join battle, she made them feel the point of her sword at once by adopting an aggressive device, to wit, a honey-bee, surrounded by the following motto, taken from Tasso's "Aminta":—

Piccola si, ma fa puo gravi li ferite,

upon which Nicolas de Malézieu, the Duc du Maine's former tutor, indited the following poetical commentary:—

L'abeille, petit animal,  
Fait de grandes blessures ;  
Craignez son aiguillon fatal,  
Évitez ses piqûres.  
Fuyez, si vous pouvez, les traits  
Qui partent de sa bouche ;  
Elle pique et s'envole après ;  
C'est une fine mouche.<sup>1</sup>

In 1694, after eighteen months of married life, the Duchess, who, like the members of the feline tribe could avail herself at will of the wounding claw or the velvet paw, cajoled and coaxed her pliant spouse into quitting their apartments at Versailles to take up their abode near the city gates in a house which Madame de Montespan had placed at her son's disposal.

The Château de Clagny now exists only in the memory of the inhabitants of a certain quarter of Versailles to which it gives its name. It was the first, and not one of the least important, of the works of Jules Hardouin Mansard whom Louis XIV. had commissioned to build it for the accommodation of his mistress. It was in every respect a remarkable structure ; vast, magnificently arranged and luxuriously decorated. Its splendour, in such close vicinity to the King's palace, seemed, as it were, to offer a challenge to the dignity of the Queen

<sup>1</sup> The bee, little though she is, inflicts mighty wounds ; beware her deadly dart, shun her stings. Flee, if you can, the thrusts that issue from her mouth ; she stings and then flies away ; 'tis a clever fly !

of France. The residence consisted of a main block, with two wings extending backwards. The façade was adorned with porticos, columns, pilasters and a sculptured pediment, and over the central pavilion rose a dome. Within, there was a gallery of pictures and, without, a park containing game preserves and an ornamental lake, the whole being bounded by extensive woods.

In those days Clagny was looked upon as a marvel.

You cannot imagine, wrote Madame de Sévigné, how gloriously she (Madame de Montespan) queens it with her dependants to the number of twelve hundred about her. Apollo's palace and Armida's garden would convey but a slender notion of it all. The park has long avenues of orange trees in wooden tubs amid beds of polianthes, roses, jasmine and carnations.

But for the Duchess Clagny had one great fault; it was too near the King and too much under the stern eye of Madame de Maintenon. It was impossible for the place to suit her independent spirit for any length of time. She soon gave it up, even as she had given up her relations with her mother-in-law who had opened its portals to her by making a present of it to the Duc du Maine. When Madame de Maintenon prevailed upon the King to disgrace Madame de Montespan, it was the little Duchess who undertook her dismissal, a piece of business to which Monsieur de Meaux put the finishing touch. The favourite departed in tears and in wrath and never forgave her son the affront. "This strange service," says Saint-Simon, "made the affections and the power of Madame de Maintenon her allies for ever." Thereafter the Duc du Maine would have no more of Clagny, while Madame du Maine was equally resolute not to return to Chantilly where she would have fallen once again beneath her father's tyrannical sway. They had to look farther afield.

### CHAPTER III

At Châtenay—Nicolas de Malézieu—Madame du Maine as a disciple of Descartes—Birth of the Prince des Dombes and the Comte d'Eu—The Abbé Genest—Pleasure-making at Châtenay—Music and play—Theatricals—Firework displays—Village fêtes—Sporting expeditions and picnics at Saint Maur—Theatrical performance of 9th August 1705.

C LAGNY had been for Madame du Maine merely a place of temporary sojourn. There she had essayed her powers of flight, made trial of her wings, there she had received large numbers of the *beau monde*, and afforded a preparatory glimpse of the splendours that were to come. She dreamed of a princely establishment such as would be worthy of her name and worthy of the rank at which she aimed. Until she could discover one to her taste, one thing was necessary at any price, and that was to keep away from Versailles and Chantilly and all their vexatious restrictions. She was led by feminine caprice to take up her abode for a while in the house of her husband's preceptor, Nicolas de Malézieu, who had a modest establishment at Châtenay, not far from Sceaux, and came to proffer the use of it to the Duc du Maine. With the notion of doing whatsoever her fancy dictated, she determined to accept the offer of this simple dwelling; she had already assumed the command in household matters. Monsieur du Maine "was in fear of his life lest she should go off her head"<sup>1</sup> and dared not thwart her. She had just manifested her wilfulness by discharging her lady-

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.



-in-waiting, Madame de Manneville. She had taken a dislike to her as being a link with Madame de Maintenon and therefore suddenly decided to sever the connexion, appointing in her stead Madame de Chambonas whose husband already held a position in the Duc's household.

Monsieur du Maine offered no opposition to going to Châtenay; it was a matter of complete indifference to him. Besides, he had always had an affection for his old tutor, and was quite content to settle down in his house, on the understanding, of course, that he was to bear all expenses in the way of furnishing, providing the additional accommodation, and so forth, that would necessarily be involved by the invasion of such a numerous household.

At once a scholar and a wit, Nicolas de Malézieu was a personality of no little interest. Beginning his career as Parliamentary advocate in 1673, he had obtained the position of mathematical tutor to the Duc du Maine, and, being thus brought into close contact with the King, he had frequent opportunities for displaying his wit and learning in the Royal presence. He was on terms of friendship with Bossuet and Fénelon, and was occasionally the arbiter of their disputes. Successively appointed a Gentleman of the King's Household, His Majesty's Private Secretary and Chancellor of Dombes, it certainly cannot be said that Fortune had frowned upon this artful and insinuating courtier. Madame de Staal in her piquant Memoirs pictures him for us as a man with an elaborate, ceremonious manner, but devoid of originality and possessing little real acumen. Fontenelle, who has included him in his "Éloges," and speaks in high terms of the sturdiness and energy of his character, is particularly enthusiastic concerning the success which had attended his efforts as Madame du Maine's preceptor in the departments of Literature and Science. After the Duc's marriage he had been retained as a sort of familiar about

the establishment, and it must be confessed that while the professor had the most apt of pupils in the Duchess, the Duchess found the perfection of professors in Malézieu. He devoted himself with success to the study of Mathematics, Literature, History, Greek and Hebrew, and even dallied with the Muse.

A young princess with a thirst for universal knowledge, adds Fontenelle, found ready at hand a teacher who was able to satisfy her intellectual cravings, a teacher whose good-will she did not fail to enlist by the employment of those means which persons of her rank have ever at their command, and whose secret lies in revealing the esteem they entertain for those whose affections they are anxious to conciliate.

This compendium of all the talents initiated the Duchess into the literature of Greece and Rome, and made her profit by the power which he possessed in an extraordinary degree of translating classical poetry at sight. When all allowances for exaggeration have been made, there remains a considerable intellectual equipment for a princess who had to play her part in the world. But Malézieu did not stop there; he added astronomy and Descartes to the curriculum. Although the latter school of philosophy had not attained any widespread popularity at that period, and had not been adopted in the University, it had already begun to attract a fair number of disciples. In his life-time Descartes had numbered two illustrious women among his pupils, Christina of Sweden and Elisabeth of Bohemia, and after his death Madame du Maine grew so enamoured of his doctrines that she became a thorough-going Cartesian. She argued with power about the different systems of philosophy, and set herself to convert those around her to her own newly acquired views. It may be inquired what benefit she could have derived from such a study. Might she not have said with Descartes: "I perceive that it is not so simple to get rid of one's prejudices as to set fire to one's house."

She was one day to prove the truth of this saying. The ethical system propounded by Descartes inculcated the necessity of always rendering obedience to the laws and customs of one's country, of showing moderation in one's opinions, and of securing a victory over oneself rather than of conquering fortune. This we should have thought was a philosophy little calculated to find favour with the Duchess.

So great was Malézieu's ascendancy over her quick and ardent spirit that, if we are to credit the sarcastic statement of the Marquis de Lassay, it was he who told her what to do, and even what to think. "Her judgments of men and matters," he proceeds, "depended entirely on the ideas he chose to give her about them." Lassay clearly exaggerates when he affirms that the little duchess used only to repeat what Malézieu had taught her, especially in scientific matters. "I am always longing to cry out, 'Pretty Polly,'" he adds maliciously, "when I hear the company expressing their admiration of the sparkling wit and profound learning of the duchess." Molière had dealt so mercilessly with *les femmes savantes* that there was nothing to prevent the later critics holding them up to ridicule, in whatever rank of society they might be met with. But popular calumny went even further. It was given out, without any genuine evidence to support the charge, that the charming young duchess was more deeply attached than she ought to have been to her husband's former tutor. This was not the only accusation of the kind which slanderous tongues were to lay at her door. But Lassay himself, who cannot be suspected of partiality for the Duchess, denies that there was ever any irregularity in her relations with Malézieu. According to him the explanation of his professorial assiduity is to be found in the fact that it was enormously in his interests to maintain his ascendancy, since on it his reputation and his fortune

were alike dependent. "Monsieur de Malézieu," he wittily observes, "represented grace abounding, and Monsieur du Maine grace sufficing." This was not over much, it must be confessed, in a husband. The fact is that Malézieu was reputed a regular mine of erudition, and everyone listened to him as to an oracle. What wonder that Madame du Maine should set the example? Was he not an Academician and did not that unquestionably entitle him to be regarded as a *bel esprit*?

His decisions, says Madame de Staal, were credited with the same infallibility as was attached, by his disciples, to those of Pythagoras. However hot the dispute, it ended abruptly when anyone said, "*He* said so."

It was in 1699 that he invited the Duchess to stay with him a while during the absence of the Court at Fontainebleau. So pleasantly did Madame du Maine pass her time at Châtenay that she went there again the following year. This, as we may imagine, was a mighty honour for the humble scholar who had never entertained nobility before. And what a glorious tradition for his house when, in the year 1700, the Duchess arrived in an interesting condition and was there delivered of her first-born, the Prince des Dombes! His younger brother, the Comte d'Eu, was born the following year. The Principality of Dombes and the County of Eu came to them through Mademoiselle de Montpensier, she having brought them as a marriage portion to Lauzun, of whom they were the heirs.

Châtenay was a pretty village surrounded by orchards and vineyards, and Malézieu's house was agreeably situated. It was, however, quite an ordinary abode, the counterpart of one in the village market-square, which is pointed out as Voltaire's birthplace. The Duchess found it none the less to her liking on that account, for in it she was free to do as she chose. She played

the part of a sort of Lady Bountiful, lavishing gifts on the people of the countryside and taking a great interest in the villagers. But, above all, she amused herself, and, for many years, amusements were to occupy the greater portion of her time. It was Châtenay that witnessed her début as a Princess of Fairyland. Malézieu went to all kinds of trouble to gratify her caprices, while the gentle and indulgent Duc du Maine defrayed the expenses. In his labours Malézieu had recourse to the assistance of the Abbé Genest, a sort of lettered voluptuary, who had done everything under the sun for a living, having been by turns one of Colbert's clerks, professor of languages in London, equerry to the Duc de Nevers in Rome, and, lastly, thanks to the influence of Bossuet and Malézieu, official tutor to Mademoiselle de Blois. A thoroughgoing adventurer and a *bon vivant* into the bargain, there was very little of the ecclesiastic in his composition. Twice crowned by the academy and a zealous follower of Descartes, he was a man of a jovial but fiery disposition. Writing to Mademoiselle de Scudéry, he tells her

Des tranquilles plaisirs la troupe est retirée  
Dans le paisible Châtenai.

Music used to occupy a large part of the programme. There were flutes, oboes, violins, harpsichords, and even trumpets. In the evening, after the chase or the promenade, the Duchess would gather the company around her. They would all sit down to *hocca*, but the *malignité* of the game would be counteracted by the *sagesse* of the lady presiding at the table. Life went very merrily and no one had a care in the world. They used to make fun of the old Abbé's portentous nose, that comical personage serving as a butt for the society at Châtenay even as the poet Santeul had fulfilled a similar rôle at Chantilly.

Every evening began with a theatrical performance and a pyrotechnic display, superintended by Monsieur de Villeras, formerly an officer in the Piedmontese regiment. "He had the art," so we are informed by contemporary records, "of making these fireworks no less amazing by their inexhaustible diversity as by their beauty." Now it was "a tourney," now "the defence of a besieged village," or "the sun flaming out upon the summit of a column," or "two large vessels at anchor in a meadow." Although the art was then but in its infancy, the Ruggieris of the day managed to win applause and excite wonder. On Sundays and holidays the inhabitants joined in the revels, and all the countryside echoed with their song.

The calmest among the guests at Châtenay was the Duc du Maine, whose serious tastes found little to gratify them in this round of amusement. His part consisted in paying the expenses and in watching the villagers dancing on the tree-girt lawns which formed the scene of their junketings. "They gave themselves up to jollity with a will," so the records run, "and began to taste some of the joys of peace." These fêtes in honour of the Duchess, diversified by theatrical performances, in which Malézieu played the principal rôle, went on from 1699 to 1705. It was the most remarkable thing in the world to see the mathematical professor, the middle-aged philosopher, thus transformed by the magic wand of the princess, and playing the part of bard, dramatic poet, ballet-master or comedian, according to her bidding, pressing into the service all the mythological lore which he had formerly made the subject of his lessons. His greatest triumph was the village fête held in July 1702. On that occasion the following lines were recited by the Sylvanus of Châtenay :—

Je ne suis point de ces grands demi-dieux,  
Dont Chantilly, Saint-Maur ou Sceaux sont le partage ;

Je suis l'humble Sylvain de ces champêtres lieux,  
 Mon pouvoir se termine à cent pas du village.  
 Mais j'ai sur eux un avantage :  
 Un prince issu du sang de mille rois  
 A respiré chez moi pour la première fois.<sup>1</sup>

The little Prince des Dombes, who was still in the cradle, must have been flattered. He was then scarcely two years old. The Duchess was in the early stages of her second pregnancy and had not been able to accompany the Duc to Fontainebleau whither the Court had for a while removed. She had therefore deemed that she had a right to some pleasure on her own account, and the pursuit of it henceforth became the lode-star of her life. On the day in question she caused luncheon to be served, in a room hung with branches, by servitors attired as fauns. There was a ceaseless round of masque and revel and song. Multitudinous and motley was the rout that passed across the scene. Wizards, hobgoblins, planetary bodies, astronomers, harvesters, heroic ladies, knights-errant, cyclops, bohemians, dryads, all had their parts to play in these impromptu pageants. Now it would be skittles, concealing agile tumblers, that would appear, take up their positions, and fall down of their own accord. Anon players of *brelan* or of *lansquenet* would come on the scene habited as Kings of Clubs, Knaves of Spades, and Queens of Hearts, and interweave some mazy dance ere they seated themselves at the table. The most renowned dancers of the Académie Royale had charge of these displays. Then there followed interludes of various kinds ; Mythology represented by Philemon and Baucis ; Chivalry by the fairy Urganda, and then allusion and allegory in the Mystery Play ;

<sup>1</sup> I am not one of those great demi-gods who take up their abode by turn at Chantilly, Saint-Maur or Sceaux ; I am the humble Sylvan of these rustic regions, my power comes to an end a hundred feet away from the village : but I have this advantage over them : a prince descended from a thousand Kings drew his first breath in my dwelling.

the whole being varied by lyrics after the manner of the following, addressed to the Duc de Nevers by the Duchesse du Maine, for she too had begun to importune the Muse :—

Avec sa lyre,  
 Quand Nevers chante dans nos bois,  
 Il n'est point de cœurs qu'il n'attire,  
 Comme fit Orphée autrefois,  
 Avec sa lyre.<sup>1</sup>

The ingenious Malézieu invented a novel kind of entertainment, "A nocturnal surprise," he called it. It was a quaint and courtier-like conceit. A mountebank had to present to the Duchess an *esprit universel*, a wondrous compound of skill, taste, insight, conversational charm, clearness of enunciation, vivacity, grace, and so forth. One can easily imagine the success of the idea. Nothing wins its way like a compliment, even a fulsome one, and Madame du Maine was pre-eminently accessible to flattery.

After the fête which we have just described, a move was made to Saint Maur, where this light-hearted country-house existence was continued at the residence of Monsieur le Duc, whose sister had named him the Baron de Saint Maur. He too took life merrily. "Come," he wrote her, "come to my modest barony and see a poor baron."

Venez ; vous n'aurez ni *toutres* ni cailles  
 Ni marcassins, ni faisandeaux ;  
 Mais bons dindons, bons pigeonneaux,  
 Et causerez les funérailles  
 Au plus de quelques lapereaux.<sup>2</sup>

And so at Saint Maur the festive round went on, with many a hunting-party, many a luncheon and picnic in the open air.

<sup>1</sup> When Nevers tunes his lyre and sings in our woods there is no heart that he does not draw to him, even as Orpheus of old.

<sup>2</sup> Come ; you will have neither turtles nor quails, nor boars nor young pheasants ; but good turkeys, good pigeons, and you will cause the funeral of a few tender rabbits.



For the revels of the 16th August 1704 at Châtenay, Malézieu had written a masque in which he himself played the chief part—that of the Prince Samarcande, who had been bewitched by a wicked fairy. He had come from the heart of Russia to beg deliverance from the spell at the hands of the fair Ludovise. The music was composed by Matho, and the dances were arranged by Précourt. In the end the illustrious Samarcande has the honour of being enrolled as a Knight of the Order of the Honey-Bee.

It would unduly tax the patience of the reader were we to prolong our account of the various mythological dramas that were played at Châtenay. Suffice it briefly to refer to the performance of the 9th August 1705 as being the most important of them all.

There was played on that occasion a comedy in three acts expressly written by the Duchess for Malézieu, who was to take part in it. A theatre was improvised in a marquee illuminated by candles. The guests of princely rank occupied the place of honour, behind them being three hundred spectators. There was an orchestra of thirty-five musicians. The prologue was by the Abbé Genest and the music by Matho. The nymphs of the countryside, two simple village maidens, sang the praises of the divinities of Sceaux for deigning to honour them with their presence. "When Malézieu made his appearance people nearly died with laughter" the Abbé complacently informs us. In the small hours of the morning there were quadrilles, and finally supper where, we learn from the testimony of Hamilton, an Englishman, the ladies appeared with the same charms as at the first meal and with something more besides.

## CHAPTER IV

Purchase of the demesne of Sceaux by the Duc du Maine (1699)—The Château—The pavilion of Aurora—The lake and breeding-grounds—The Duchess takes up her quarters at Sceaux—Her artistic tastes—Her new existence—Her literary preoccupations—Malézieu becomes her secretary—The Abbé Genest at Plessis-Piquet—The Order of the Honey-Bee—Mademoiselle de Launay—Her early life—Entertainments at Sceaux—The visits of the Duchesse du Maine.

**E**NCHANTING as Madame du Maine found life at Châtenay, she nevertheless craved for a larger stage on which to play her part; she must needs possess an establishment of her own where she might queen it as her fancy prompted, and have her court about her. Nothing less than the entire valley of the Bièvre would suffice for her! She had, therefore, some time ago made up her husband's mind—the indispensable Malézieu was the originator of the idea—to purchase the huge Château of Sceaux, not far from Châtenay, which was then without a tenant.<sup>1</sup>

Its two last owners, Colbert and the Marquis de Seignelay, had made of it one of the finest seats within the neighbourhood of Paris.<sup>2</sup> The grounds, which

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Sévigné to Madame de Coulanges, Cambese, 1st December 1690. "Letters," vol. ix., p. 591, Monmerque's edition: "I wanted to write you about Monsieur de Seignelay's death. What a death! and what a loss for his family and for his friends. They tell me his widow is inconsolable and that there is talk of selling the Château de Sceaux to Monsieur le Duc du Maine. Heavens, what a deal one could say on the subject!"

<sup>2</sup> See in the Cabinet des Estampes the five engravings by Percelle and Isaac Silvestre, made when the Château had just been built, and reproduced in the "Histoire de Sceaux," by M. Advielle.

consisted of nearly two hundred acres enclosed by walls, were situated in four parishes, Sceaux, Châtenay, Plessis-Piquet, and Châtillon. Colbert had acquired the barony of Sceaux by purchase from the Duc de Tresmes at a cost of 185,000 livres. Seignelay's death occurred in the year 1690, and there had even then been some question of selling the place to the Duc du Maine, although he was not married at the time.

The palace of Sceaux had been built in 1597 after the severely rectangular designs that came into vogue in the seventeenth century. It was surrounded by a pleasure-laid out in the French style by Le Nôtre, who had had the happy notion of transforming what was formerly a ditch into a great canal modelled upon that at Versailles. The approach to the Château lay through Bourg-la-Reine and the Orleans road, thence along a noble avenue known as "la Diane," which spread out in the shape of a crescent in front of the palace. Le Nôtre had caused ten thousand cubic-metres of earth to be excavated in order to construct the flower-beds and terraces. Drinking-water was conveyed by monumental aqueducts from Vaulx-Robert and Aulnay. These waters were raised to a great height by artificial means and were then discharged into an octagonal basin built by Colbert in 1675. As at Versailles, the park was reached by descending a series of terraces which formed a wondrous amphitheatre commanding an extensive view.

The Château had been restored in Louis XIV. style and was an imposing structure, with a frontage consisting of five blocks and roofs *à la Mansard*. Over the central pavilion was a Minerva by Gilardoni. One of the façades of the palace overlooked the avenue, the other commanded the Châtenay valley. The entrée to the Court of Honour was reserved for the King's carriages and those of the princes of the blood. Access to it was gained through an outer court. Claude Pervault had

been entrusted by Colbert with the task of enlarging and beautifying this luxurious abode, and Le Brun had been commissioned to adorn it with paintings. The frescoes on the Chapel dome represented the fulfilment of the Old Law by the New.

Since Colbert's time one of the attractions of the place had been a graceful building erected in the kitchen-gardens and known as the *Pavillon de l'Aurore* from a painting of the Aurora on the ceiling of the cupola which, like the chapel-roof, had been embellished with frescoes by Le Brun. Aurora was represented as leaving Cephalus in order to illumine the Universe. She was holding on her way along the Zodiac with her gaze fixed on the Early Dawn which preceded her. Love was her Charioteer. Over the entrance was depicted Night drawing her dusky curtains. The ceilings of the two lateral chambers were painted by Delobel. The delightful little pagan Temple, whose lines were as slender and graceful as they were harmonious, was destined to be set apart by the Duchess for her social gaieties. Malézieu, in poetic vein, foretold its future in a song dedicated to Her Most Serene Highness, assigning the following words to the Pavillon de l'Aurore :—

Malgré ma superbe structure,  
Le temps, tyran de la nature,  
Ébranlera mes fondements ;  
Mais ma mémoire, consacrée  
Par vos nobles amusements,  
Sera d'éternelle durée.<sup>1</sup>

The prophecy has been fulfilled. The traditions of the place live on and the structure itself remains, but if, thanks to its solid foundations, Time has not levelled it with the ground, he has at least laid so rude a hand

<sup>1</sup> Despite my proud structure, Time, Nature's tyrant, will undermine my foundations ; but my memory, hallowed by your noble revels, will endure eternally.

on it that it threatens to crumble into dust, and cries aloud for restoration. Its magnificent wood-carvings were burnt during the siege of 1870—a deplorable piece of Prussian vandalism. We gaze with melancholy admiration, as we dream of all the vanished splendours that it calls to mind, upon this lovely little remnant of Louis XIV. architecture. Le Brun's frescoes still adorn the cupola, but those of the side chambers have been removed to the Hôtel de Trévise in Paris.<sup>1</sup> Quinault, in honour of the pavilion, has dedicated a whole poem to the story of Aurora. The frontispiece of the poem is by Charles Le Brun and a vignette by Sébastien Leclerc represents the nymph of Sceaux, with a coronal of flowers upon her head, riding upon a cloud.

The park was filled with the works of art. The sculptor, Coysevox, had graven on stone and marble the "motifs" of the Great Cascade whose waters issued from urns fed by two streams within the grotto of a terrace. All these waters, descending from basin to basin and flowing into an octagonal lake ten or fifteen acres in extent, where rose a fountain seventy feet into the air, at length found their way into the Great Canal. Grassy slopes now mark the site of this vanished waterfall. The vast parterre had a view over the woods, and was bounded by the walk known as the *Quatre Statues*. Midway in the *Balustrade des Pintades* was the beautiful *Balustrade du Gladiateur*, an object of universal admiration. The fishpond, which was Colbert's work, had been excavated at great expense. Outside the park, along the road to Versailles, was the *Ménagerie*, built upon grassy tiers in the form of a handsome circular pavilion with two vestibules. It was designed by La Guespière, architect to the Duc de Wurtemberg. The whole arrange-

<sup>1</sup> The author desires to express his indebtedness to Madame la Marquise de Trévise, the present owner of the house, under whose courteous guidance he became acquainted with its treasures.

ment of parkland and buildings bore the impress of Colbert's genius, and offered a strong temptation to the cultivated taste of the Duchess as well as to her husband whose æsthetic leanings were no less pronounced. The deed conveying the estate of Sceaux to the Duc du Maine is dated 20th December 1699. The purchase price was nine hundred thousand livres, and it was stipulated that the money should be paid within three days. The cession of the market of Sceaux to the butchers of Paris reduced the amount by more than a half. Nevertheless, in default of the necessary ready-money, the purchaser was obliged to raise by mortgage sufficient funds to make up the sum. In the deed, which is preserved among the records at Sceaux, the new lord of the château is thus described: "Most High, Most Puissant, and Most Excellent Prince Monseigneur Louis Auguste de Bourbon, by the grace of God Sovereign of Dombes, Duc du Maine and d'Aumale, Comte d'Eu, premier Peer of France, etc." <sup>1</sup>

An army of workmen was at once set to work to carry out improvements and extensions, and it was not until five years had elapsed that the Duc and Duchesse were able to instal themselves in their new palace. There the latter found her true *milieu*; she was Queen of Sceaux, and it was with enthusiasm that she entered into possession of an abode so admirably adapted to her ideas of luxury, comfort and elegance. But besides this Sceaux had one inestimable advantage for her independent nature, and that was its comparative distance

<sup>1</sup> The deed concludes as follows: "And by these same presents, the above-named sell and transfer to the said Duc du Maine all the statues, pedestals, vases, tables, tiles, marble busts, bronzes and other articles, whether within or without the Château de Sceaux and in front of the enclosure of the park thereof, including the orange trees, bushes, and their cases, the vessel and boat which are on the canal, without any reserve. And this in consideration of the sum of 80,000 livres which the said Duc du Maine undertakes to pay in silver louis. . . ."



LOUIS AUGUSTE DE BOURBON, DUC DU MAINE  
*From a print in the Bibliothèque Nationale*





from the Court. Out of sight of the King and Madame de Maintenon she could henceforth abandon herself unreservedly to her caprices.

The Duc du Maine, whose duties as Grand Master of Artillery kept him much engaged at Paris or Versailles (they ensured him apartments beneath the same roof as the King), was only an occasional visitor at Sceaux. This exactly suited the Duchess for it involved a mentor the less, and of mentors she would brook none of any description.

Amid all her splendours Madame du Maine had not lost her love of study; she therefore wished to have a place of refuge whither she could escape from the general life of the Château. Her ordinary apartments, situated on the ground floor to the left, and looking on to the flower-gardens, were filled with sculptures and valuable porcelain, and the floors were inlaid with costly wood. But in the southern pavilion she had a little retreat which she called her *Chartreuse*, and it was there she went to study her part when she took up acting. She had furnished it with taste, and a remarkable thing about it, considering the period, was that access was gained to it by a lift worked by means of pulleys. The Duc du Maine's apartments were distinct from those of the Duchess who liked plenty of breathing space and plenty of freedom. She required a card-room, a study, and salons in which to show off her *objets d'art*. With these, her needs were fulfilled.

The fine arts had somewhat declined towards the end of the reign of Louis XIV. The days of Poussin, Lesueur, Philippe de Champagne, Claude Lorrain and Jouvenet were gone by. Nevertheless Mignard and Lebrun were still alive, and Madame du Maine had the good fortune to inspire their last works. She encouraged them both with her money and her excellent criticism, her wish being to play the part of Mæcenas to her genera-

tion as her grandfather in his time had done at Chantilly, but she had no love for art of the decadent school. She was no prude, but she objected to the licentious in her frescoes and decorations; she would suffer none of that over-bold voluptuousness which was beginning to characterize the artistic productions of the day, and which was to be so freely developed during the Regency. She surrounded herself with costly objects made by the most skilled artificers, paying, without a second thought, whatever price was asked, and becoming in herself alone a market for everything that was choice and luxurious. The number of statues in the park was largely increased, and she enriched the collections that Colbert and Seignelay had formed and enshrined in such a delightful architectural setting. The works of improvement and the fêtes given at Sceaux and at Châtenay attracted, thanks to the bounty of the Duchess, a large number of workmen into the neighbourhood who established themselves with their families, and whose descendants remain there to this day. Thus she brought prosperity to the country around her.

The new Châtelaine of Sceaux was about twenty-five years of age, and had reached that period of her life when, as has been said, "a woman learns that if beauty is a means of pleasing, it is not the only means, nor even the most effective." Thus, haughty, impetuous, intolerant and fickle, as later on Madame de Staal represents her, she showed herself gentle and conciliating toward those whom she wished to bring beneath the sway of her pastoral crook, for she was to be not only a queen, but a shepherdess of Arcady also. Scarcely was she settled at Sceaux than, to her husband's despair, she began to play ducks and drakes with the money, and allowed her imagination to run wild in those diletante studies that attracted her no less powerfully than the pleasures of the *beau monde*. But though left to her own

devices, she never, let us hasten to add, gave the slightest cause for scandal, nor did she tolerate any doubtful behaviour beneath her roof. At a time when French society regarded sexual purity as a mere convention, her own conduct was never unbecoming. Besides her two infant sons she had a daughter, Mademoiselle du Maine. The rearing of her two boys she entrusted to domestic hirelings in order that her social occupations should suffer no interruption.

Her principal aim was, little by little, to gather round her celebrities in the domains of Literature and Science, and to reign among them as a Sovereign over her subjects, an ambition which was evidently suggested to her by the traditions of Rambouillet. Voiture, in the middle of the seventeenth century, had created a sort of society literature. He had excelled in poetry of the lighter and more amusing vein, in the airy mockery and graceful banter of the *Vers de Société*. Chapelain, Benserade, Mademoiselle de Scudéry, the Marquise de Sablé, Godeau, Segrais, were to find their imitators at Sceaux. Madame du Maine, then, made it her business to attract to her court the *beaux-esprits*, and even Saint-Simon is obliged to confess that she possessed the secret. In order not to part with Malézieu she made him her secretary, and he left Châtenay to take up his quarters at Sceaux, where he skilfully seconded the Duchess in her literary activities. Thus it was that Sceaux grew famous and became "une cour de gaie science," of noble gallantry and of a philosophy slightly tinged with Epicureanism. It put on the airs of an Académie Française. A continuous exchange of verses went on between Sceaux and Saint-Maur, the residence of Louis III., Monsieur le Duc, the Duchess's brother, who also plumed himself on being a *bel esprit*. The Abbé de Chaulieu used to rhyme for the brother at Saint-Maur—the Abbé Genest used to reply at Sceaux for the sister. She could never have done without

Genest, of whom she would make fun, playing upon his name and calling him "Large-Nez" on account of his extraordinary nasal appendage, tossing him as a prey to the merciless buffooneries of the company. People at Sceaux long remembered the Abbé Genest; his name was legendary.

Fontenelle, one of the Duchesse du Maine's regular guests at Sceaux, has given an excellent definition of her tastes. "It was her pleasure," he tells us in his "Éloge de Malézieu," "to have revels and tableaux at her château, but she liked them to have some idea, some ingenuity, at the back of them."

By devoting himself to the worrying little details of her theatrical performances, Malézieu gave her one of the most striking proofs of condescension that she could have received from a man of learning. He cudgelled his brains and drew upon his grave and serious talents in order to arrange pieces in which he himself was often one of the actors. For a scholar and a man of letters and a member of the Academy—he had been admitted in 1701—he was getting a good many duties to fulfil,<sup>1</sup> for besides the rather comic-opera sort of office which the whimsical Queen of Sceaux had bestowed upon him, he was still a man of affairs and there was plenty of scope for his abilities in this direction at Sceaux, where the head of the house was for the most part an absentee and his lady a spendthrift. Malézieu had become chief adviser to the Duc du Maine and Chancellor of Dombes, that is to say, the premier magistrat of a sovereignty which was one of the fairest jewels in the heritage of the du Maines. He it was that held the strings of the purse, and not over tightly it would appear.

<sup>1</sup> In the midst of the fêtes at Sceaux he was appointed by Madame de Maintenon as mathematical tutor to the Duc de Bourgogne, in which task he found himself back again in his element. His verses, letters, songs, sonnets and tales were included by the Abbé Genest in his "Divertissements de Sceaux," Trévoux, 12mo (1712-1715).

In consequence of the lead given by the Duchess to her people, the valley of the Bièvre soon became a vale of Tempe. In a masque played at Châtenay before the Duchesse du Maine, the author, in singing the praises of this valley, averred that the sun shone more brightly there than in any other region, that the flowers exhaled a sweeter perfume, and that there was a special quality in the air which disposed the spirit to tranquillity. It appeared that what the air disposed to more than anything was classical mythology, for there was not a village in the neighbourhood but had its rural deities, its Fauns and Nymphs and its Sylvanus; divinities who were to play a great rôle in the revelries at Sceaux. Malézieu had quartered the Abbé Genest near by at Plessis-Piquet, but Madame du Maine hunted him up in his little lodgings, where she found him busily employed on a metrical version of Descartes, and brought him back to Sceaux in her carriage. Malézieu made a sort of gossip of him in matters connected with the organization of the fêtes. Though they laughed at his absurdities and his caricature of a face they made great use of the old man as a theatrical factotum.<sup>1</sup>

In the "Recueil des Divertissements de Sceaux," compiled by him and printed by order of the Duchess at her own expense, we have two volumes of short poems which rarely merit quotation. The topical touch was given by the Duchess herself. They were often quaintly turned and may have been amusing at the time, and that was all that was demanded of them. But champagne once uncorked soon loses its sparkle. Madame du Maine, in her sovereign authority, would set Malézieu and Genest, her "poets while you wait," a-writing madrigals to any subject that came into her head. There was no getting

<sup>1</sup> Charles Claude Genest (1635-1719), ex-almoner of the Duchesse d'Orléans, and author of "Pénélope," a tragedy, and of the "Philosophie de Descartes."

out of it ; never an instant at rest herself, she was forever devising some fresh elfin freak and always on the look-out for new people to invite to her reunions at Sceaux. Her salons were thronged, and whether out of curiosity or out of compliment, they were even more affected than the Court itself. This flattered her pride, and she was always anxious to do better still. She ran everyone off their legs and permitted no one any rest in her house. She even refused to allow herself sleep as being an unworthy mode of repose for an ethereal princess.

Haughty and ambitious, as she is shortly to prove herself, intellectual, as we have already seen she was, she frequently betrayed the sort of simpering childishness that one associates with the behaviour of a comic-opera shepherdess. The romantic and the heroic possessed an irresistible appeal for her imagination, and in 1703 she had founded the Order of the Honey Bee of which she constituted herself perpetual Grand Mistress. This order became henceforth one of the standing amusements of her Court. It was an elaborate parody of the chivalric orders, suggested to her by the crest and motto she had adopted.

According to the rules of this quaint association, the Knights and Ladies—their number was limited—who formed it, were elected in Chapter with great solemnity. The first ceremony took place at Châtenay, in the presence of Monsieur le Prince, Madame la Princesse, Mademoiselle d'Enghien and Monsieur le Duc. Let us conjure up the scene. The magnificent salon, an imposing throng, wherein we distinguish men who bear names renowned in the realms of science and letters. The Duchess is the Queen Bee, all wise and all powerful. With her golden wand in her hand, she rules over the assembly, seated on a throne beneath a canopy of blue velvet sown with bees and silver spangles. Her diminutive stature and the delicacy of her features give her the appearance of some

Ariel-like creature of the skies. The aspirant drops on bended knee before the throne and waits submissively. Solemnly he is made to swear by Mount Hymettus inviolable fealty to the mighty fairy Ludovise. He pledges himself to come to take his seat at any Chapter where his presence may be required in the enchanted palace of Sceaux, the chief establishment of the order. He is also made to swear to honour the Bees, to love pleasure and the dance, and ever to cherish a medal, stamped with the image of the Duchess, with the following inscription engraved upon it :—

LOUISE, BARONNE DE SCEAUX, DIRECTRICE PERPÉTUELLE DE  
L'ORDRE DE LA MOUCHE A MIEL.<sup>1</sup>

This medal Madame du Maine hangs round his neck with a lemon-coloured ribbon. The semi-pagan, semi-burlesque ceremony concludes with a merry supper in fancy dress. At every new investiture the following refrain was chanted :—

Viva sempre, viva ad in honore cresca  
Il novo cavaliere della mosca.

The ribbon with which the Knights were decorated by the Duchess, became an indissoluble bond between her and those whom she chose, so skilfully, to be the assiduous companions of her pleasures.

This strange device had at all events the effect of bringing to pass a miracle which was suddenly to bring about the dawn of a star whose merit alone was destined to make her shine more brightly than any other satellite in the Duchess's train. This is how it came about. It chanced that in one of the elections for the Order, a "mere

<sup>1</sup> The medal, which was in gold and weighed three gross and sixty grains, was struck the 11th June 1703. The design has been reproduced by Advielle ("Histoire de Sceaux")—Tobiensen Duby, "Recueil général des pièces obsidionales, Récréations numismatiques," p. 142. "Divertissements de Sceaux."

lawyer," *Président de Romanet*, was chosen in preference to two great ladies, the *Comtesse de Brassac* and the *Comtesse d'Uzès*, who were highly indignant at the slight. That such a thing could have taken place amid royal surroundings! The horror of it! It was positively a revolution! What could be done in the face of such an affront? It fell to the lot of a young girl whom none had even heard of to solve the question. Her idea was to draw up in the names of the victims a formal protest against the enrolment of such a plebeian candidate as being an outrage against every precedent and tradition. The document was couched in stiffly legal phraseology, and written in a sort of notarial hand. She had it conveyed in a roundabout manner to the Grand Mistress of the Order, who read it, and thought it clever but a trifle bold. Who could have written it? No one knew, no one could tell. One after another the guests were questioned, but to no avail. After having puzzled them all, the mysterious "man of the law," who was laughing in her sleeve, though not without qualms as to the possible consequences of her temerity, continued the joke by leaving about in the salons of the Duchess little scraps of paper containing the following lines:—

L'auteur que vous cherchez n'habite point les cieux.  
 Fixez donc à vos pieds vos regards curieux.  
 Alors, à la clarté d'une faible lumière,  
 Vous le découvrirez, gisant dans la poussière! <sup>1</sup>

So, then, the poetess hails from the domestics' quarters! Madame du Maine plying her questions, at last discovered that the pleasantry, so skilfully carried out, originated with her own maid, a penniless girl of good parentage whom she had recently taken into her service on the recommendation of a friend, and whose sallies had

<sup>1</sup> The writer whom you seek dwells not in the heavens; fix then your curious gaze upon the ground. Then, by the ray of a feeble light, you will discover the object of your search writhing in the dust.



already made it clear that she had plenty of brains. Her name flew from mouth to mouth. Everybody was eager to know her. The rating she got from her mistress could not have been very severe, for taking heart from the success of her first adventure she lost no time in embarking upon a second. The aged Fontenelle, it seems, had been to consult a fashionable clairvoyante called Mademoiselle Testard. She was the daughter of a famous beauty, and professed to tell fortunes. The habitués of Sceaux laughingly gave out that he had fallen in love with the pythoness. The maid kept her ears open as she went about from salon to salon, and, without saying a word, gathered what everyone was saying about the matter. She embodied the various opinions in a letter to Fontenelle and sent it anonymously to the celebrated author of "l'Histoire des Oracles."

It is, she wrote, not so much your visit to Mademoiselle Testard that has caused such a sensation but rather the account that you have given of it. So great are the divergences of opinion in regard to the matter that I am compelled to make them known to you. People profess themselves astonished—and not, perhaps, without reason—that the destroyer of oracles should have cast himself on his knees before the couch of Mademoiselle Testard. In vain is it said that the charms of magic and not those of the lady are responsible for his position, for a philosopher takes no count of either the one or the other. And so everyone is gossiping about it. . . . If you care to repay my confidence by returning me your own, I promise to make good use of it.

Fontenelle was not offended. On the contrary the light and ironic touch of the thing rather took his literary fancy, and he did not disdain to send her a reply couched in language of appropriate banter.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The text of both letters is printed in the "Annuaire littéraire," of 1775, vol. vi. p. 232, and is also to be found in the "Œuvres de Fontenelle." Mademoiselle de Launay's letter is included in the "Mémoires de Madame de Staal.

Madame de Staal plumes herself on having reaped that day a great advantage from a thing done on the spur of the moment and with no trouble to herself, and this not only by reason of the immediate applause which it gained her, but by the fact that it made people desire to know her and won for her acquaintances and friends of distinction.

It was certainly true that everyone at Sceaux had the camerista's name on his lips. She was a little thing full of mischief and seductiveness, and her reputation for wit could not but excite the curiosity and win the admiration of the people about her. The place she fills in the life of the Duchesse du Maine, and indeed in the literary history of the period, is far too important for us to omit a special mention of her here.

Though her real name was Marguerite Cordier, she called herself by her mother's maiden name, Delaunay,<sup>1</sup> which she separated into "de Launay" when she came to Sceaux because she thought it would make more of an impression. Born in Paris in 1683 of obscure parentage, her early years, of which she relates some interesting details in her "Memoirs," were rich in incident. Indeed, her whole life was a romance. Few women with endowments above their station have had greater need than she of resignation and strength of character to enable them to endure the vexations and hardships of their lot.<sup>2</sup> She was brought up in a convent, thanks to the influence of Madame de Grieu. But Madame de Grieu died when Rose was twenty-six, and she had to quit the shelter of the cloister. At this point in her career the Duchesse de la

<sup>1</sup> At fourteen she was studying Descartes and Malebranche. She gave up her metaphysics later on for fear of losing her faith.

<sup>2</sup> In my childhood I was treated as a person of distinction, and later on I discovered I was nobody. Not having in my early days subdued my mind to ill-fortune, I have always struggled against the circumstances of humiliation and servitude in which I found myself, and therein lies the origin of all the misfortunes of my life ("Mémoires de Madame de Staal").

Ferté took her into her service. Malézieu owes his discovery of her to the fact that she used to be led about like a monkey at a fair to Versailles, Paris, and Sceaux, and he it was that introduced her to the Duchess who, however, paid no particular heed to her at the moment. But Malézieu persevered and endeavoured to enlist Madame du Maine's influence with her mother, Madame la Princesse, with a view to procuring her a situation with Mademoiselle de Clermont. "But if the girl is such a paragon," cried the Duchess, "why hand her over to my niece; would it not be better to keep her myself?"—an utterance which implied a species of philanthropy not so very uncommon to-day, for then, as now, charity often began at home. So the upshot was that Mademoiselle de Launay remained behind at Sceaux, to the great despair of Madame de la Ferté, who missed her terribly.

It was decided then and there that the newcomer should assist Madame de Malézieu in the care of the Duchess's little daughter, Mademoiselle du Maine. She seemed in favour and for the moment thought it possible that she might eventually secure the post of under-governess. But a year went by and the outcome of all her endeavours was that she had to be content with the modest position of lady's-maid. No duties could have been less compatible with her tastes and endowments. Thereafter her star declined. The people of the Château began to hold her cheap, and Malézieu himself kept her at arm's length, as though she were one of the servants. She ate the bread of bitterness and experienced a state of mind to which the modern governess is but too seldom a stranger.

Short-sighted and inexperienced, she made, poor girl, a most unfortunate beginning in her lowly task, though she jokes about it in her Memoirs without a trace of ill-feeling. Poorly housed away up in an attic, without fire and without air, she was given "chemises to sew." When Madame du Maine came to put them on, "she

found the elbow all out of place.”<sup>1</sup> The awkward, short-sighted girl, she declared, knew nothing about needlework, and her duties would have to be transferred to someone else. Rose made bungle after bungle. Her pride was sorely wounded, she tells us, when she felt herself so slighted and misunderstood by the very kind of people with whom she considered herself naturally fitted to mingle.

After the Testard affair, however, her fortunes began to revive a little. “Her Most Serene Highness,” she writes, “condescended to speak to me and got used to the novelty. She was pleased at my replies and thought a good deal of my approval; I noticed indeed that she went out of her way to gain it, and that often when engaged in conversation she would look over to me to see whether I was listening.” It soon dawned on Madame du Maine what a capital secretary she could make out of this wide-awake and intelligent young woman. She thus became, little by little, her mistress’s factotum at Sceaux, her relationship with the Duchess being much the same as that of Mademoiselle de Lespinasse with the Marquise du Deffand. But her rôle was a most exacting one and most difficult to play. She was expected to harmonize discordant elements in the guests, whether social or intellectual, to make everyone shake down together, to keep them amused, to persuade them to display their attractive side to the Duchess, to maintain and direct the conversation without taking too prominent a part in it herself. Hers it was to see that no susceptibilities were wounded, to guard against topics that might irritate, to make herself agreeable to everybody, and, first and foremost, to the tyrannical princess, her mistress. These duties required an extraordinary amount of tact, and she needed all her resourcefulness, all her adroitness to aid her in carrying them out.

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Staal, “Œuvres complètes,” Paris, Renouard, 1821.

A recent historian, Madame Arvède Barine, has observed that in modern society, with its democratic constitution, there is no room for the self-effacing individual, half retainer, half friend, whom one encounters so often in the annals of the great families of former days, when the almost canine faithfulness such people displayed towards masters and mistresses who were always exacting and frequently ungrateful, was taken as the merest matter of course. Such, alas, was the position in which Rose de Launay found herself with the Duchess.

By her consuming activity Madame du Maine made even the most phlegmatic of her guests bestir themselves and take part, if only as walking ladies or gentlemen, in her performances. She even pressed into her service grave and reverend magistrates such as Chief President de Mesmes of the Parliament of Paris, as well as other dignitaries of State whose allegiance she may have secretly hoped to win by offering them good dinners and hospitable and diverting entertainment. She was continually devising fresh amusements, theatricals, concerts, dances, *jeux d'esprit*, madrigals, rhyming matches, guessing competitions and so on. Nothing but a crowd of guests would satisfy her, and revels that lasted till cock-crow. In the daytime it would be a drive to some charming spot in the neighbourhood, or there would be a comedy to rehearse or poetry to be read.

When the mistress of the house grew weary of her own abode away she would go, ever bent on pleasure, sometimes to Paris where her husband, as Grand Master of the Artillery, had sumptuous quarters at the Arsenal overlooking the Seine, or sometimes to Clagny, which had no longer any terrors for her. Or else she would betake herself to Saint-Maur to Monsieur le Duc, or to Madame de Polignac's at Saint-Ouen, to Fresnes and to Passy to the Duc de Nevers, to Madame de la Ferté's

at Chailly, or to Madame d'Artagnan's at Plessis-Piquet. And then back again she would come to her favourite residences at Sceaux or Châtenay. She was seldom seen at Versailles, still more rarely at Chantilly where, since her father's latest illness, life had become a hell for all his relations, above all for Madame la Princesse who, however, remained at her husband's side and never set foot in the Château de Sceaux.

## CHAPTER V

The first Court of Sceaux—The Duchess and her *bêtes*—Fontenelle—President Hénault—President de Mesmes—The Abbé de Chaulieu—The young Arouet and Œdipus—Cardinal de Polignac—The Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire—Lagrange-Chancel—Poetical lotteries—The marionnettes—The theatre at Sceaux and at Clagny—The Duc du Maine at Sceaux—The Duchess unfavourably regarded outside her own Court—She loses several children—Malézieu finds an ally in Mademoiselle de Launay—The Abbé de Vaubrun and “les grandes nuits” at Sceaux—Criticisms on the extravagances of the Court at Sceaux.

THE men and women who frequented the Court at Sceaux—her *bêtes* the Duchess used laughingly to call them—were a brilliant throng, and the Duchess was proud not only because the habitués of her salon were many but also because they were distinguished. She formed, as it were, the central sun of a planetary system round which revolved a crowd of luminaries, whose names may be gleaned from the *Temple du Goût*. *Grands seigneurs*, dandified abbés, comic poets, who by the profligacy of their lives offered a protest against the austere piety of the King's Court. Foremost among them were to be seen, at the salons of the Temple or near the person of Philippe d'Orléans, men of doubtful moral character, such as the Grand Prior of Vendôme, the Duc de Sully, the Marquis de la Fare, and later on the Prince de Conti, etc. To call a man a courtier in those days was to associate him with what may have been the most brilliant but was certainly not the most reputable section of society. Courtiers there were who came to Sceaux, but to please

Madame du Maine they left, or at all events pretended to leave, their immorality behind them. They were mum about the public scandals of the day and the orgies that went on at the Palais Royal, and were all for the things of the mind. The Duchess had a certain broad-mindedness about utterances of questionable propriety; she even went the length of saying that what elsewhere might be a piece of effrontery, became transmuted, in the precincts of her privileged residence, into nothing more than a piece of harmless gallantry.

The *bêtes* may be divided into two categories—the grands seigneurs and the men of letters. Conspicuous among the men of princely or noble rank we have Louis III., Duc de Bourbon-Condé or the Baron de Saint-Maur, the Duchess's brother. He was a man of peculiar temperament, liable to the same violent attacks of passion as his father and grandfather had been. But his bravery as a soldier had been proved in many a battle. He had also a keen literary taste and occasionally dabbled in poetic composition. Then there was the Duc de Nevers, an aged Epicurean, while mention may also be made of the Ducs de la Force and de Coislin, the Comte d'Harcourt, Monsieur de Dampierre, the Duke of Albemarle, a natural son of James II.

Among the princesses and *grandes-dames* there were Mademoiselle d'Enghien, the Duchess's sister, the Duchesse de Nevers, her first cousin, who was known as the lovely Diana. She was one of the glories of the little Court of Sceaux and loved the pleasures of the table, a taste which was shared by her daughter the Duchesse d'Estrées; then there were the Duchesses de Lauzun, de Rohan and de la Feuillade, the Marquises de Mirepoix, de Charost, d'Antin and de Boussoles; Mesdames d'Artagnan, nicknamed "the neighbours" because they lived at Plessis-Piquet; Mesdames de Chimay, de Lassay, de Barbezieu and de Croissy; Mesdemoiselles



de Choiseul, de Moras, de Lussan and de Langeron ; Madame de Livry, the Duchess's lady-in-waiting ; altogether a delightful throng of beautiful women, the loveliest of a period which, though decadent, was full of charm, and by its urbanity, its elegance and its wit, atoned for all its misdeeds.

Coming now to the men of letters we may head the list with Malézieu and Genest, the "official" poets of the ducal court. Around these twin coryphaei of the *bel esprit* gathered others whose names posterity has invested with more enduring lustre, such as Voltaire, Fontenelle, Hénault, de Mesmes, Dauchet, La Fare, Chaulieu, Sainte-Aulaire, and a host of lesser lights. Music was represented by Matho, Mouret, Bourgeois, Marchand, Bernier, Colin de Blamont, who clothed with melody the complimentary effusions that descended like rain upon Her Most Serene Highness. The earliest recorded recital of chamber-music was given by Mouret in the Duchess's salon at the Arsenal of Paris.<sup>1</sup>

Glancing more in detail at the various figures composing this little court, we may begin with Fontenelle, who busied himself alternately "with Urania's compasses and Euterpe's flute." Voltaire compared him to one of those happy lands which bring forth in profusion fruit of every kind, and in the *Temple du Goût* he sang of him :—

C'était le discret Fontenelle,  
Qui, par les beaux-arts entouré,  
Répandait sur eux, à son gré,  
Une clarté douce et nouvelle.<sup>2</sup>

Though a nephew of Corneille, he had nothing of the tragic vein in his composition. It was said of him at

<sup>1</sup> A piece of information due to the courtesy of Monsieur Franz Funck-Brentano, assistant librarian at the Arsenal. Adolphe Jullien, "Histoire des petits cabinets."

<sup>2</sup> It was the discreet Fontenelle who, surrounded by the fine arts, shed upon them, at will, a new and gentle radiance.

his death<sup>1</sup> "that he was of an affectionate disposition, refined, gay, elegant in his bearing, but fastidious, almost a coxcomb, in his personal appearance. 'Like a bee he skimmed over the jewelled meadows, never venturing into the regions of winds and storms.'" One day, when he was ninety-eight, Fontenelle declared that he had never laughed and never wept, forgetful how merrily the hours had sped at Sceaux, the very Temple of Laughter, fifty years before. Though Delille had said of him that he was ever on his guard, even with his friends, he had counted many friendships in the course of his long life and, to the end, Madame du Maine remained one of his devoted admirers. A man of many gifts and great culture, he wielded a triple sceptre over the realms of literature, science and the beau-monde, having found, in the words of a writer of the present day<sup>2</sup> "the very niche to suit him between the three." But it was at Sceaux, where the stateliness of the Court of Louis XIV. was united with the sparkling wit of the Hôtel de Rambouillet and an added piquancy of its own, that he found himself peculiarly at home. The Président Hénault, "famed," according to Voltaire's lines, "for his supper-parties and his chronology," was a sort of Atticus, well-skilled in steering a middle course between the Parliament and the Throne. A loyal servant of the Muses—until he became the adoring admirer of Madame du Deffand—he had written a comedy entitled *l'Homme inutile*, as well as several tragedies and a variety of poetical compositions, all of which bear the impress of a refined and cultivated mind. At Sceaux, amid surroundings that formed a marked contrast with the Palais de Justice, he used to meet the Président de Mesmes, another compound of parliamentarian and the man

<sup>1</sup> Speech delivered by M. Le Beau, permanent secretary of the Académie Française.

<sup>2</sup> M. Émile Faguet.

of fashion, whose subtlety as a courtier and keenness as an intellectual had excited the admiration of Hénault.

Never, wrote the latter, was I brought in contact with a personality of greater charm, with a man of more perfect breeding. His intellectual accomplishments had procured him the *entrée* into the best circles, while his office gave him the power to choose his friends among the greatest in the land. He was the most acute man of his day.

Hénault's gift for turning complimentary verses won him the favour of the ladies, and none would have suspected that this loyal minister of the God of Love who wrote such sparkling lyrics in honour of his divinity had once worn the sober habit of an Oratorian, or that he was the author of anything so grave as a "History in the form of a Dramatic Poem." It was Madame du Maine who had wrought the miracle.

The Abbé de Chaulieu was another disciple of Epicurus who did not precisely pose as a saint. He fulfilled for Monsieur le Duc at Saint-Maur an office similar to that which Malézieu had undertaken for the Duchess at Sceaux, writing verses for him and addressing in his name madrigals and poetic epistles to Madame du Maine. Malézieu having on one occasion celebrated in song Chaulieu's presence at a supper-party, the gallant Abbé replied with the following impromptu strophe :—

Qui peut avoir un regard de du Maine,  
 Et qui connoît le pouvoir de ses yeux,  
 A-t-il besoin de chercher d'autres dieux,  
 Ou d'aller boire à la belle fontaine  
 Où si souvent s'enivre Malézieux ? <sup>1</sup>

As a matter of fact there was nothing so very remarkable in the Duchess's eyes; only they imparted great ex-

<sup>1</sup> Whoso can win a look from Madame du Maine and knows the power of her eyes, what need has he to seek other gods, or to go to drink at that fountain whereat Malézieu so oft intoxicates himself?

pressiveness to her countenance. But this was enough for writers, and especially for courtiers, who were ever ready to force the note, and Chaulieu never let slip the slightest opportunity of expressing his admiration of Madame du Maine. He paid his footing at Sceaux, where he stayed for months together, in the only coin he had at his command, the coin of adulation. One day he took it into his head to send her a purse—empty of course—which he declared he had obtained from Mercury, the God of Thieves. In the verses which accompanied the gift, he described all the “talents” he had found in it, viz. : talents for pleasing, for bewitching, for winning affection, for speaking well, for serious discussion or for trifling, talents for uniting elegance with precision in writing, and, lastly, much imagination.

The poetry is unremarkable enough, like the courtier himself, but the idea was none the less ingenious, though the mind that conceived it was already falling into senility. Old age had not chilled the poet's heart which still throbbed warm for love. Chaulieu said with a sort of happy ingenuousness that he

*Servait encore un dieu qu'il n'osait plus nommer.*

It was in the last few years of his life, from 1713 to 1718, that he enjoyed the acquaintance of Mademoiselle de Launay at Sceaux. Despite the infirmities of his seventy years, he became her passionate admirer, reviving all the ardours of his prime to sing his youthful mistress's charms. One day, in a fit of rather rash generosity, he begged her to accept a present of one thousand pistoles. Mademoiselle de Launay in declining it gave him a piece of advice in return for his kindness. “Beware,” she said, “of making similar offers to other women—you might find one who would take you at your word.” The old man bit his lip as he retorted, “Oh, but I never do such things in the dark.” Certainly she was a high-

principled girl. Her exacting duties at Sceaux were sometimes relieved by invitations to the supper parties of the Prieur de Vendôme at the Temple, where, we are informed, she proved more than once the most amiable of bacchantes. In her honour Chaulieu wrote the charming little fragment which we quote below and which is to be found in the collected edition of his works. It is possibly the last effusion that flowed from his Anacreontic pen.

Launay, qui souverainement  
 Possèdes le talent de plaire,  
 Qui sais de tes défauts te faire un agrément,  
 Et des plaisir du changement  
 Jouir, sans paroître légère,  
 Même aux yeux d'un fidèle amant,  
 . . . Que ne te dois-je point ?

For many years after the Abbé's death, Madame de Staal could not recall the memory of her old friend without a grave and wistful sadness. Nevertheless, he appears to have bestowed some very daring epithets upon her which she certainly did not deserve and which she would have done well to repudiate at once.<sup>1</sup>

It is uncertain whether Madame du Maine was aware of the attentions which were being shown her maid by one of her own guests at the Château. Probably she was, and shut her eyes. In those days, love-making was part and parcel of life in a château, and the mistress of a house who did not include it in the distractions which she offered to her guests, would have been considered no less lacking in her duties than if she had neglected to provide one of the courses at dinner.

Although in 1714 the young Arouet was but twenty

<sup>1</sup> "Je vous adore, libertine, coquette, friponne, avec tous vos défauts. . . ."—"Recueil des lettres de Mademoiselle de Launay," an ix. vol. ii. p. 315.

years of age, he was already perfecting himself in the use of those weapons of irony by means of which he was, as Monsieur de Voltaire, to permeate his generation with so many destructive theories, scattering abroad a largesse of ideas in which the evil far outbalanced the good. But even at the time of which we are writing, this too caustic poet, this philosopher endowed "with a genius for contradiction," was beginning to come into prominence. He was on intimate terms with the Duc de Vendôme and the Prince de Conti, and though as yet he had no great vogue, his love of glory and notoriety, seconded by a feverish energy and unparalleled conceit, had made him seek admittance at every door. Introduced at Sceaux by his godfather, the Abbé de Châteauneuf, he there adopted the lordly style of the grand seigneur. He placed himself on a familiar footing with the grandees, and trusted to his dash, his verve, to bring him off triumphantly. He had had the audacity, mere son of a notary though he was, to say to the Prince de Conti, who had read some of his usual effusions to the Duchess, "Monseigneur, you will be a great poet some day, and I must get the King to grant you a pension." The Duchesse du Maine was then just beginning to shower her favours on Voltaire, and the road to Sceaux was, for thirty years to come, to be more familiar to the philosopher than any other. But ere this he had to make acquaintance with the interior of a prison. His first imprisonment in the Bastille dates from the 17th May 1717.<sup>1</sup> Scarcely had he regained his freedom than he went airing his conceit from château to château. We shall encounter him again very soon.

The courtly abbés of the period were too often but amiable pagans, who lived lives of pleasure, taking their religious duties very lightly. A great beau, like the

<sup>1</sup> He was released 14th April 1718. Franz Funck-Brentano, "Les Archives de la Bastille."



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majority of his type, rather indiscreet and enjoying, said gossip—let us hope it was calumny<sup>1</sup>—the good graces of Madame du Maine, Cardinal de Polignac<sup>2</sup> represented at the Court of Sceaux the last of those great prelates of the Gallican Church who plumed themselves on being able to discourse in Latin with as much fluency as in their mother tongue. He was an inimitable raconteur and had, moreover, written a Latin poem which he entitled “Anti-Lucrèce.” The poem, now utterly forgotten, was a defence of morality and theology,<sup>3</sup> and had been suggested to him by the discussions he had carried on in Holland with Bayle, whose Epicurean ideas, which had then recently appeared in the *Dictionnaire critique*, he was anxious to refute. The work, written in excellent Latin, was of the didactic order and enjoyed an extended vogue in France. The Duchesse du Maine made the author read her a French translation from the scholarly pen of the Duc du Maine, a circumstance which lent it an additional interest.

Mademoiselle de Launay took part religiously in these learned readings. Polignac was not only a cultivated littérateur, but also an accomplished diplomat, as he had already demonstrated both at Rome and in Poland. Madame du Maine’s weakness for “le beau cardinal”

<sup>1</sup> Madame la Palatine, who was always on the look-out for petty court scandals, wrote on the 2nd September 1718: “The Comte d’Albert was here last year; he paid attention to Madame du Maine, and Cardinal de Polignac was jealous and followed her right into the ball-room, and when he saw the Comte and the Duchesse together, he was unable to contain himself and burst out into a rage. Thus it got about that he had been to a ball, and people have laughed a great deal over the matter.”

<sup>2</sup> He was descended from an old feudal family, which, if it did not go back as some genealogists affirm it did to Apollo and the Apollonides, was nevertheless very powerful in the Middle Ages (“Note by M. d’Haussonville”).

<sup>3</sup> He had composed it in his Abbey of Bonport whither the King had sent him into retirement as a punishment for having failed, as ambassador at Warsaw, to secure the election of the Prince de Conti to the throne of Poland.

did not prevent her from carrying on a blameless little flirtation with a venerable poet who, like Fontenelle, was destined to die a centenarian. This was the Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire, of whose genius Voltaire wrote the following :—

L'aisé, le tendre Sainte-Aulaire,  
 Plus vieux encor qu'Anacréon,  
 Avait une voix plus légère :  
 On voyait les fleurs de Cythère  
 Et celles du Sacré Vallon  
 Orner sa tête octogénaire.<sup>1</sup>

Sainte-Aulaire had nicknamed the Duchess his shepherdess, and she in turn called him her shepherd. Sainte-Beuve remarks that the presence of this venerable shepherd at Sceaux had the effect of throwing into greater relief the youth of the lady who had associated herself with him in his pastoral duties. A rival of Fontenelle's in wit as well as in longevity, the Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire was the author of a large number of poetic trifles which were never gathered together in volume form, even when he was elected a member of the Academy, although they were not without merit, the merit at least of having been written on the spur of the moment. People used to compare Sainte-Aulaire to Anacreon. There was something rather ludicrous in the spectacle of this old man trying to play the gallant. He was immoderately enthusiastic about the Court of Sceaux, of which he used to imagine himself the presiding functionary. His gentle wit, his unfailing geniality were the delight of the place, and he possessed more markedly than any of his fellow-wits the art of paying pleasing compliments to the Duchess.

“What is the difference,” she asked him one day,

<sup>1</sup> The kindly, tender Sainte-Aulaire, older even than Anacreon, sang yet more delicately than he. Around his aged head the flowers of Cythera and the Sacred Valley were seen to bloom.

endeavouring to put him in a quandary, "between me and a clock?" "Madame la Duchesse," he answered, without a moment's hesitation, "a clock tells us the time, *you* make us forget it." Sainte-Aulaire's practice was to have epigrams prepared for use when opportunity offered—it was thus he paid his footing. "Cydias is a wit; it is his profession," La Bruyère had once said of him. "He puts himself on a par with Lucian and Seneca, when he is really nothing but a pedant and a coxcomb." Pedant and coxcomb perhaps, but then who was not at Sceaux? As for being a wit, it was in very truth a profession beneath the Duchess's roof, and Sainte-Aulaire found himself in his element there more than anyone else.

The author of *les Caractères* laid the critical lash rather too heavily on "Cydias," who was the last of the school of Voiture, Urfé and Mademoiselle de Scudéry. When Sainte-Aulaire was admitted in 1706 among "the forty" it was on the strength of a famous quatrain addressed to the Duchesse du Maine. "What! for four lines," cried Thomas Corneille. "No, five," answered Cardinal de Rohan, and he quoted from memory a *jeu de mots* composed impromptu by the Marquis when the Duchess, taking advantage of his ignorance of the subject, was pressing him rather severely about Descartes' philosophy:—

Bergère, detachons-nous  
De Newton, de Descartes.  
Ces deux espèces de fous  
N'ont jamais vu le dessous  
Des cartes, des cartes.<sup>1</sup>

Malézieu had two colleagues to assist him in arranging the revels at Sceaux. These were the Abbé Genest

<sup>1</sup> Shepherdess, let us have no more of Newton or Descartes. Those two species of madmen never knew the secret of things. (The play on the name Descartes and the phrase "voir le dessous des cartes," to see underneath the cards, i.e. to be in the secret, is untranslatable.)

and Mademoiselle de Launay, but so complex grew the task that he must needs call in a third. He therefore took into the partnership Lagrange-Chancel, an author whose star was already in the ascendant and to whom the Princesse de Conti had prevailed on Louis XIV. to extend his patronage. His education in the drama he owed to Racine. In 1694 his *Jugurtha*, a work of the "precious" school, had been performed in public, and was followed three years later by *Orestes and Pylades*. Plain, squint-eyed, and lank-haired, this academician, playwright and musketeer, who had once been the friend of Bossuet and Fénelon and had taught mathematics to the Duc de Bourgogne, may be appropriately classed with Campistron, Longepierre and Lafosse. He rarely quitted Sceaux, where he used to declaim his tragedies to the Duchess, till the time came to thunder forth his famous Philippics in support of the cause of the Duc du Maine.<sup>1</sup>

Such were the principal characters among the *bêtes* of the Duchess: puppets who danced as she pulled the strings, hangers-on whom she helped to live, amusing them and amusing herself. Malézieu made it his special task to tend and nourish the budding wit. The young poets whose aid he invited had to pass examinations. He instituted competitions for effusions in honour of the Queen of Sceaux; but in his own adulatory efforts he outstripped everyone. This is a specimen:—

Lorsque Minerve nous ordonne.  
On a toujours assez d'esprit ;  
Si l'on n'en a pas, elle en donne.<sup>2</sup>

Although as far as deeds went no irregularities were allowed at Sceaux, improprieties of speech were almost

<sup>1</sup> Marquis de Lagrange-Chancel (1650-1729).

<sup>2</sup> When Minerva lays her commands upon us we are never lacking in wit; or if we are, then she bestows the gift upon us.

the rule there. Fontenelle claimed that daring ideas could always be expressed in decent language, and the Duchess listened to readings from Boccacio in public.<sup>1</sup>

Everyone had a nickname at Sceaux. The Duc du Maine, who played the smallest part, was the *garçon*; his little boys, the Prince des Dombes and the Comte d'Eu, were the *garçonnetts*. The Abbé Genest was dubbed *l'Abbé Rhinocéros*, Président de Mesmes was called the *Majordomo*, and so forth. Someone invented the poetical lottery, of which the rules were as follows. The letters of the alphabet were put in a bag and shaken up, and then everyone would put in his hand and take out a letter. According to the letter drawn, one would have to write a fable, another a sonnet, another a comedy. The luckless individual who found himself with an 'o' had to produce an operetta. Critics were not supposed to be too severe on these impromptu productions. When the wits were at a loss for an idea they escaped from the difficulty by falling back on a compliment or an epigram. They used to write carols which, we learn from a diarist of the times, however devotional they might be, always finished up with a couplet in which the eyes of the Duchess were likened to the stars of heaven. There were also marionnette shows. The Duchess loved to see Punch belabouring the man of law. The marionnettes, which had been imported from Italy, had been inaugurated by Colbert at the Court where they had won the royal favour. Performances were given before the King at Sceaux in the apartments of the Duchesse de Bourgogne, and very risky were the utterances put into the mouths of these little wooden gentry.

Thus when in 1705 the Duc du Maine, in spite of his rank of prince of the blood, was refused admission to

<sup>1</sup> Walecknaer, "Histoire de la vie et des ouvrages de La Fontaine." Paris, 1824, 3rd edition, p. 241.

the Académie Française—an occurrence that had particularly upset the Duchess—Malézieu, to avenge this unlooked-for reverse, composed a pasquinade concerning the event, which he caused to be performed by the marionnettes of Sceaux. It was entitled “La scène de Polichinelle et du voisin.” Hence, thunders from the Academicians, and a very torrent of songs and rondeaux in Paris against the Baron de Saint-Maur and the “Sire de Châtenai.” The latter was especially singled out for attack. Here is an example :—

De la part de l'Académie,  
On fait savoir aux beaux esprits,  
Qui veulent remporter le prix,  
Que celui de la poésie  
Sera pour qui dira le mieux  
Des injures à Malézieux.<sup>1</sup>

The Duc du Maine, who had composed a part of the piece for the fun of the thing, now took up the cudgels on behalf of Malézieu, the chief author ; whereupon the Académie let the lash fall on the back of the Duc :

L'on fait savoir aux curieux,  
De la part de Polichinelle,  
Que le chancelier Malézieux  
N'est point l'auteur de la pièce nouvelle ;  
Que le véritable histrion  
Est Monsieur le duc de Bourbon.<sup>2</sup>

There followed a regular tornado of verses, diatribes, verbal fireworks, the combat being waged with equal vigour on either side. As a penalty for having mixed themselves up in the fray, the Duc du Maine and his

<sup>1</sup> On behalf of the Academy the wits are informed that the poetry-prize will go to the candidate who displays the greatest skill in insulting Malézieu.

<sup>2</sup> Enquirers are informed by Polichinelle that the chancellor Malézieu is *not* the author of the new play. The real dramatist is Monsieur le Duc de Bourbon.

brother-in-law, Monsieur le Duc, sustained more than one shrewd thrust in the course of this literary squabble. Malézieu, who was an Academician, had fired on his own party, and it was some time before he was able thoroughly to regain his position in the ranks of that learned assembly.

The quarrel had been a great advertisement for the Court of Sceaux. The Duchess was always pleased with anything that caused her to be talked about or spread her name abroad as a *bel esprit*. The combat had no terrors for her—she lived for emotions, particularly those of the stage. Within her own walls at Sceaux she had set up a theatre that was destined to achieve renown, and in which talents of the first order were to win applause. Malézieu and Madame du Maine themselves were the chief actors. Performance followed performance in rapid succession. The Duchess used to play alternately at Sceaux and Clagny, where she also had a theatre, and whither she betook herself the more conveniently to entertain the grandees of the Court of Versailles, of whose rivalry she had no longer any apprehensions. Moreover, she had long since emancipated herself from the control of Madame de Maintenon. Contemporary accounts are not enthusiastic concerning the Princess's histrionic talents. None of her entourage, however, were allowed to say anything derogatory regarding the diminutive little personage's appearances on the stage. Saint-Simon, of course, is down on her, going so far as to say that she thoroughly ruined herself by reading romances and stage plays, and that she was so entirely bound up in them that she spent years of her life in learning them by heart and playing them in public on the stage. To make up for her lack of talent as an actress, she had a memory that never failed her, and immense self-possession. The plays were magnificently staged, and she played in brilliant attire before the Court and the

town. Coached by Baron,<sup>1</sup> the well known actor, she undertook the most difficult and varied parts such as Azaneth in *Joseph*,<sup>2</sup> Célimène in *le Misanthrope*, Laurette in Quinault's *Mère coquette*. This last was one of her most successful impersonations, and the name Laurette clung to her in consequence in addition to the numerous other curious sobriquets which flatterers had bestowed upon her. In 1705 she was acting nearly every night during the season at Clagny, and she would undertake a leading rôle in a drama of Racine or Euripides with as little compunction as a part in a play by the Abbé Genest. Malézieu was as stage-struck as his mistress. As representative of the Duc in Dombes, he was one day called upon to receive a solemn visit from the deputies of that province. "Pardon," was the answer returned to them, "but Monsieur de Malézieu is unable to see you; he is taking part in a comedy." The Duchesse de Bourgogne was frequently present at the performances at Clagny. It was there that she saw the Duchess in *les Importuns*, a play of Malézieu's, in which the author himself took a part. While Saint-Simon ridicules these actors, the *Mercure galant* praises them to the sky. In that publication are to be found full details of the productions in which the Duchesse du Maine appeared in public at Clagny during the whole of the winter of 1708, just indeed as she had done the two preceding years.

It was certainly not the Duc du Maine who encouraged his wife to go to Clagny. He rarely went there himself since his mother's disgrace, and it was not until long afterwards that he came to take up his abode again in a residence that harboured such unpleasant recollections. Moreover, he was pained at seeing the Duchess exhibiting

<sup>1</sup> The other actors were the two Malézieus, father and son, the Marquis de Roquelaure, the Marquis de Gondrin, etc.

<sup>2</sup> By the Abbé Genest. She also played in *Pénélope*, by the same author, which had been unsuccessful at the Théâtre-Français.



herself night after night on the stage. When he could not avoid being present, he made himself as little conspicuous as possible, sitting in the corner of a doorway, not saying more to anybody than good manners absolutely necessitated, and inwardly cursing the reckless extravagance with which his establishment was carried on before his eyes. If he ventured to offer the slightest objection "the inequality of the marriage would be thrown up at him, and often, for a mere nothing, he had to put up with fits of the sulks and storms of temper."<sup>1</sup> Sick of the whole thing he decided to give the Duchess a free hand to do whatever she liked, and to let her ruin him with her soirées, her fireworks, her balls and her comedies. He presented so tristful a visage at the fêtes at Sceaux that Madame du Maine dispensed with his presence as often as possible. She would send him off to "his little turret," where he whiled away the time translating *l'Anti-Lucrèce* or sketching plans for his gardeners; a humiliating situation which did not escape the Parisian lampooners.<sup>2</sup>

Occasionally the Duc would go to his mother-in-law and tell her all about Madame du Maine's extravagance. He put the matter very clearly before her one day when Madame Saint-Simon was there, but Madame la Princesse

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.

<sup>2</sup> De sa femme et de sa fortune  
Esclave soumis et rampant,  
Du Maine ne se livre à l'une  
Que quand de l'autre il est content.

Sa femme joue en comédienne,  
Reçoit toutes sortes de gens,  
Et sa maison est toujours pleine  
De coquettes et de galants.

A Malézien cette princesse  
Prodigue ses plus doux appas;  
Il lui montre de la tendresse,  
Mais on dit qu'il ne l'aime pas.

("Recueil Maurepas," year 1710.)

was helpless, feeling herself like the Duc unequal to facing her daughter's anger. The Duchess's high and mighty airs often upset the household, and she would sometimes go so far as to put her luckless husband in a very sorry plight indeed. He had to do the apologizing and make excuses for her tantrums. There was one such incident à propos of the Duchesse de Lauzun, one of the inner circle at Sceaux, who always attended Madame du Maine when she went to Marly. One day, on the return to Versailles, Madame de Lauzun was kept playing cards with the Duchesse de Bourgogne, and Madame du Maine waited for her friend in vain. In a storm of passion, she upbraided her for this piece of unavoidable neglect, would listen to no explanation and refused to have anything more to do with her. Madame de Bourgogne, who was also extremely annoyed, decided to keep Madame de Lauzun to herself, and told the whole story to the King. Louis XIV. approved of what she had done, and Monsieur du Maine, who always had to bear the racket, came in for a dreadful rating. Madame du Maine therefore had to sing small. In disfavour with Madame de Maintenon, on bad terms with Madame la Duchesse, her sister-in-law, as well as with the Princesse de Conti, her sister, and little beloved by anyone at Versailles, she had practically only her own little court to fall back upon. She essayed to hold out the olive branch, but the whole of the King's Court held her at a distance. The Duc du Maine had to apologize for her to Madame de Lauzun ; but Madame de Lauzun never went to Sceaux again. Ludovise, therefore, had to find another favourite. She pitched on a certain Demoiselle de Moras, whom she made the Duc de Brancas take to wife in 1710 in the church of Sceaux. Then to Saint-Simon's great disgust she presented this " noble duchess " at Versailles, though her father was merely president of a court of justice, and she only had a few mill-wheels for a dowry.

Pain is frequently the price we pay for our pleasures, and amid her gaieties Madame du Maine was several times brought to bed with child, though her confinements, owing to lack of attention, were not as successful as they might have been. Four of her children she lost in infancy. These maternal troubles, however, did not render her inconsolable, and she hardly permitted them to interfere with her theatrical soirées. In consequence of passing the nights in revelry she had lost the power to sleep. The better to keep her mind on the alert she used to make Mademoiselle de Launay read to her for hours together, from midnight till dawn, without troubling herself very greatly about her companion's repose. Rose de Launay's sole consolation amid the trials of her subordinate position had lain in the resources of her own imagination. But now Madame du Maine, who had a good deal of faith in her ingenuity, began to employ her on less humble tasks and set her to collaborate with Malézieu. It happened that one evening—it was in 1714, when the Court had attained the zenith of its renown—that the Duchess, weary of being read to, was preparing to spend the night at the card-table. She was at this time bordering on forty, and though married for twenty-two years she had but three children living, the Prince des Dombes, the Comte d'Eu, and Mademoiselle du Maine. The cares of rearing her family sat lightly upon her. Indeed, for fifteen years past her chief preoccupation had been to win new recruits to her court, to replace those who fell away and so to foster it that it might rival the King's in distinction and brilliancy. But alas, everything palls and loses its savour sooner or later, and at Sceaux there were signs that even the springs of poetry were beginning to run dry. "Verses, more verses," she cried eternally to her faithful secretary, "more verses or I shall die." Such was the condition of affairs when the Abbé de Vaubrun came on the scene, "le sublime

du frivole " as the Duchess called him. It was popularly said of him that he was three cubits tall on his right side and only two and a half on his left. He had a touch of the motley in his composition, but although rather a grotesque creature, he possessed a fund of imagination and inventiveness. His ambition was to mark his arrival by introducing something new and startling into the established form of entertainment, and to this end he and Mademoiselle de Launay put their heads together to concoct plans for ministering to the Duchess's amusement not only by day but also, and more especially, by night. The result of their joint lucubrations took the following form. There was a tableau-vivant. Suddenly, in the midst of a dance, there entered a mysterious figure robed in black gauze spangled with silver stars. It was Night coming to render thanks to Ludovise in the presence of her friends, for the preference which she had given to the hours of darkness over those of light. It fell to the lot of Madame d'Estrées to do the honours of the occasion by handing to Madame du Maine a pretty lantern engarlanded with dusky blooms, what time Mademoiselle de Launay, in the background, sang a nocturne in a voice of pleasing quality. Despite the weakness of the execution the idea was pronounced original, and achieved a huge triumph. Thenceforth the *Grandes Nuits* became a recognised institution. They began in the Spring, proved an immense success, and, as a consequence, attained a wide celebrity.

Rose de Launay was the life and soul of these entertainments. The piquant qualities of her conversation no less than the charm of her literary style, which combined Fontenelle's cleverness with a bewitching artlessness all her own, had already won her a reputation. All the gentlest spirits among the Duchess's friends cultivated her acquaintance. She had henceforth her own little

circle of admirers, a court within a court as it were, and occupied a similar position to that subsequently held by Mademoiselle de Lespinasse in the salon of Madame du Deffand. Before they went to chat with the mistress of the establishment, the guests were wont to pass an hour or two in the dark, stuffy little attic that was occupied by the dependant. There it was that she used to draw up plans for *les Grandes Nuits*, a task to which she devoted a great deal of energy.

I composed, she tells us, bad verses for some of them, arranged the details of many others and was consulted about them all. I played parts and I sang songs, but my nervousness ruined all. It was therefore considered expedient to put me on the committee, and in that capacity I succeeded so well that I acquired great renown.

What then were these *Grandes Nuits*? In those days they were considered the most marvellous representations of fairy-land, perfect triumphs of the scenic art, but how colourless, how tame they would appear to modern eyes. Illuminations, country revels, songs, dances, little recitations, verses sung by torchlight to an instrumental accompaniment, allegories to the glory of the princess and so forth. Now it would be an Embassy from Greenland coming to offer congratulations to her because she abhorred the Sun; now Venus feigning to find her lost girdle at Sceaux, and others without number of those mythological performances then so much in vogue. These "Nights" used to last to any hour, and the longer they went on the more the Duchess was delighted and the more she laughed at the weariness of her guests, knowing herself better able than they to bear fatigue. One might have said to her in the words of the poet Lemierre :

Eh ! quoi, des heures de repos  
Faire des veilles meurtrières,

Et fouler aux pieds des pavots  
 Qui devraient couvrir vos paupières !  
 Vous fiez-vous à vos vingt ans,  
 Ou lasse de vos agréments,  
 Dans votre nocturne manie,  
 Voulez-vous sous un œil éteint,  
 Remplacer les feux d'un beau teint  
 Par la pâleur de l'insomnie !<sup>1</sup>

The performances took place every fortnight, each being directed by a "King or Queen" specially appointed for the occasion. They began on a comparatively modest scale, but as everyone endeavoured to outshine the efforts of his predecessor they soon reached an extraordinary degree of magnificence. The Duchesse du Maine was, of course, the first "Queen." She chose *Président de Mesmes* for King, and the second *Grande Nuit* was carried out under their dual sway, as was also the fifth, which was held in the Pavillon de l'Aurore. On this occasion a thunderstorm came on and nearly swamped the decorations that had been put up for the event. However, it passed off and, the sky having become serene once more, the unfailing Malézieu delivered himself of some impromptu rhymes, attributing the auspicious change to the magic intervention of the Duchess. The main idea of that evening's performance was that Sleep, driven forth by revelry from the Château, was seeking sanctuary at the Pavillon de l'Aurore, hotly pursued by the goblin of the palace. Malézieu had written the "book," and Mouret the music for the principal scenes in this nocturne. Here is a specimen of the verses, in which it will be seen the eyes of the Duchess come in for unstinted praise :

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<sup>1</sup> Wilt thou kill thyself by turning thine hours of repose into long night-watches and crush beneath thy feet the poppies that should bring sleep to thine eyelids ! Thou trustest to thy youth, thy twenty years, or else, fordone with pleasure, thou art fain to banish the sparkle from thine eyes and replace the glow upon thy cheeks by the pallor of sleeplessness.

Sommeil, va réparer les beautés ordinaires,  
 Va rafraîchir leur teint, va ranimer leurs traits ;  
 Tes soins ne sont pas nécessaires  
 A la Reine de ce palais.  
 De tes divins pavots l'essence la plus pure  
 Ne peut rien ajouter à l'éclat de ses yeux ;  
 Pareils à ces flambeaux qui brillent dans les cieux,  
 Pour éclairer les hommes et les dieux,  
 Ils sont d'immortelle nature :  
 Le repos leur est odieux.<sup>1</sup>

And the chorus would take up the refrain :

Pour divertir *Ludovise* et sa cour,  
 Rassemblons en ces lieux Hébé, Comus et Flore :  
 Faisons ici briller l'éclat d'un nouveau jour,  
 Digne en effet du palais de l'Aurore.<sup>2</sup>

Flora naturally had to be followed by Pomona and Vertumna. These two goddesses took advantage of an interlude to make an offering of fruit to the Duchess. Never had Queen of France been courted with such wealth of homage, never had courtiers' adulation found more gallant and ingenious expression. The gay, wanton Muse of the Abbé Large-Nez,<sup>3</sup> rhymes in praise of Love

<sup>1</sup> Sleep, go thou and restore everyday beauties, renew their glow, reanimate their features ; the Queen of this Palace hath no need of thy ministrations. The purest essence of thy divinest poppies could add no lustre to her eyes, bright as the torches that flame in the heavens to serve as guiding lights to gods and men ; for their nature is immortal and to them repose is hateful.

<sup>2</sup> To divert Ludovise and her Court let us bring hither Hebe, Comus and Flora ; let us kindle the radiance of a new day worthy indeed of the Palace of Aurora.

<sup>3</sup> The Abbé Genest gave the following impromptu at the banquet :—

Le verre en main, parmi les jeux,  
 Nous saluons l'Aurore ;  
 Que parmi ces transports heureux,  
 La Nuit nous trouve encore.  
 Étoile si charmante à voir,  
 Astre toujours aimable,  
 Parais le matin ou le soir  
 Tu nous verras à table.

and Wine from that truly Anacreontic personage, the venerable Malézieu, a song hummed gaily by Ludovise herself—of such consisted the finale of a fête which had eclipsed all others in brilliancy.

It was for these *Grandes Nuits de Sceaux* that the poet Destouches composed his *Amours de Radegonde*.<sup>1</sup> All this rivalry of effort and talent shows to what a height the literary prestige of the Duchess had attained.

That great moral reformer, the inevitable Saint-Simon, who received no invitations to Sceaux, "thunders anathema" at such terribly reckless extravagance. "Fêtes and fantasies of every sort with never a day between."<sup>2</sup> Such was the burden of his own plaint, but we will do him the justice to say that all these follies had given rise to a good deal of unfavourable comment in the world at large. At first Madame du Maine had taken no notice of this chorus of reproof, but after a while it was conveyed to her, with the most diplomatic delicacy, that there was something in what Monsieur du Maine had been saying, and that daily expenditure on such a scale must eventually involve her in financial ruin. These highly justifiable remonstrances at length had their effect, and though it nearly broke her heart, she suspended the offending performances. But a complete and irrevocable sacrifice was not in her nature. She found it impossible to do without such distractions altogether, and so revived them before very long, but on a less lavish scale. The "King and Queen" were abolished,

<sup>1</sup> An opera in three acts; music by Mouret (1714).

<sup>2</sup> This is how Saint-Simon castigates his *bête noire*, the President de Mesmes, à propos of the part he played in the "Nuits Blanches." "He introduced his brother the Chevalier. . . . The Chevalier was not ashamed of playing in the comedies, nor the President of playing the buffoon. He became a slave to the game, and had the face to leave anything in order to betake himself thither. He allowed himself to be painted with a crowd of menials round him, side by side with a lackey in livery" ("Supplément aux Mémoires" (1789), London, vol. iv., p. 387)."



the necessity for economic reform being explained to the audience in a burlesque oration by the aged Malézieu.

At length, on the 15th May 1715, the last performance took place without King or Queen or President, solely under the intelligent direction of Mademoiselle de Launay. "It was wholly mine," she writes, "and given in my name, though not at my expense." It was supposed to represent "Good Taste" taking refuge at Sceaux and presiding over the various activities of the Princess. The Graces followed in his train with dance and song.

In recognition of the wit and intelligence displayed by Rose de Launay in connexion with this event, Madame du Maine, who was far from being in the habit of spoiling her *gentille soubrette*, presented her with a portrait of herself as Hebe, a character which one might think was hardly suited to her age. But a Queen grows not old, least of all a Comedy-Queen. It was necessary to return thanks in verse; that was the rule, and Mademoiselle de Launay was careful to observe it. This was her quatrain:

Tous les trésors qu'enferme l'univers,  
N'égalent point l'excès de ma richesse.  
J'ai le portrait de ma maîtresse,  
Je ne crains plus, fortune, tes revers.<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess, not wishing to be behind-hand with her retainer where wit was concerned, forthwith replied with the following:—

Vous me payez avec usure,  
Launay, d'un médiocre don.  
L'original et la peinture  
Ne valent pas votre chanson.<sup>2</sup>

Oh, royal modesty!

<sup>1</sup> All the treasures which the Universe contains never could equal my excess of wealth, for I have the portrait of my mistress, and I fear no more thy reverses, O Fortune.

<sup>2</sup> You repay me with usury, Launay, for a gift of modest worth. Neither the original nor the portrait is worthy of your verse.

Thus ended the famous *Grandes Nuits* of Sceaux, which, with the fêtes at l'Isle Adam, Chantilly, Berny, and the Temple, and the suppers at the Palais Royal by Philippe d'Orléans, represented practically the whole of the social activities of the early part of the eighteenth century. People were wont to blame the extravagant profusion of these fêtes, which they considered ill-timed in view of what was taking place abroad. Ill-timed they may have been, profligate they certainly were not, and that is assuredly saying a great deal when we consider how easily in those days gallantry lapsed into debauchery. When in her widowhood, the Princesse de Conti, the premier dowager of France, was dallying with her Spanish lover; when the Duchesse de Bourbon but too readily inclined her ear to the amorous addresses of the Prince de la Rochesur-Yon, and the Duchesse de Bourgogne herself was by no means indifferent to the insensate pleadings of Maulevrier, the closest scrutiny of the Duchesse du Maine's ill-wishers failed to detect anything morally suspicious in her conduct towards her admirers at the fêtes of Sceaux. In accepting the homage of her adorers she never, it would seem, suffered them to go too far. That is surely a fact that should lead us to think charitably of her frivolity. Madame de Caylus, having fallen out a little with Ludovise, was not backward in ridiculing her "nuits blanches." In common no doubt with many others, she knew not that beneath the alluring mask of the reveller the Queen of Sceaux oftimes concealed secret and far-reaching political ambitions.

An habitué of her house, the Marquis de Lassay, informs us how feared and hated the Duchess was, in spite of the atmosphere of adulation that encompassed her, by all who came in contact with her whenever her feelings had whirled her away from those realms of wit and gallantry wherein she bore herself with such conspicuous

charm. At such moments it was that her ambition or her interests were at stake. The old rebellious spirit that had animated her ancestors lived on in her. Ever since her marriage she had cherished one secret design, which was to neutralize the stigma of her husband's birth by procuring for him such a roll of honours and offices as would make Madame de Montespan's legitimated son the foremost prince in the Kingdom. All the time she was comedy-acting at Sceaux for the public, she was really playing a deeper game, veiling from her friends the secret of her political designs. She it was who used to send the Duc to Versailles to wring from the favours of Louis XIV. all the advantages they were capable of yielding. She dreamed of becoming Queen of France if so be the King's weakly and puny little heir should be claimed by death like the other princes of the Royal House. With Madame de Maintenon for an ally she was laying about to grasp the means of carrying out her ambitious designs. She must forever be acting, and now she was merely going to display her talents on another stage.

A skilful woman, as Madame de Tencin wrote later on to the Duc de Richelieu, knows how to combine pleasure with the everyday interests of life.

## CHAPTER VI

Ambition of the Duc du Maine—The Duchesse du Maine and her views of etiquette—The chauvinism of the Duc and Duchesse—Death of Monsieur le Prince (1st April 1709)—Questions of inheritance, disputes, and litigation in the Condé family—Death of Monsieur le Duc (4th March 1710)—The prerogatives granted to the son of the Duc du Maine—Monsieur du Maine collaborates with the King—Madoiselle d'Enghien's marriage at Sceaux (15th May 1710)—Other marriages brought about by the Duchess—Illness of the Duc du Maine (5th June 1711)—The Duchess's letters—The sudden deaths in the royal family and their consequences for the du Maines—The Duc du Maine attacked by the Duc d'Orléans—The Duchess and the royal mourning—The Comte d'Eu, Governor of Guyenne—Edict of July 1714 in favour of the Bastards—The Duchesse du Maine at Saint Cyr—She foresees the downfall of her House (August 1715)—The Duc du Maine's last interview with the King (25th August)—Epigrams on the du Maines—Alleged love affairs of the Duchess—She reveals her ambitions to MM. de la Force and d'Aumont—The Duc du Maine wins his case and usurps the title of Prince of the Blood.

**I**F we have forborne to interrupt our narrative of the brilliant fêtes at Sceaux to give ear to the echoes that stole thither, year by year, from the world without, it was because we were fain to avoid all that might bring a discordant note into that joyous harmony. But clouds had been gathering round the path of Louis XIV., now in the evening of his days. Disasters had befallen our arms, Death had been busy in the Royal House and the old King had seen his heir stricken down in the very fulness of his prime.

It was after these blows of Fate that, urged on by Madame de Maintenon, the King was most active in favour of his natural children. This policy, ill-advised and





unpopular as it was, gave rise in the early days of the Regency to the intrigues that were fomented at Sceaux by the Duchesse du Maine.

While no heed was given in the abode of the "Queen of the Bees" to the misfortunes that had overtaken the country, and the round of revelry still went on, Madame de Montespan, who was sixty years of age, was dying in solitude at Bourbon. This was the year 1707.<sup>1</sup> Alone of all her kin, the Comte de Toulouse hastened to her bedside where, nevertheless, he arrived too late. The Duc du Maine contented himself with going to and fro between Sceaux and Marly. As for the Duchess, the death of her mother-in-law had affected her but little. Old age was laying a heavy hand on Louis XIV. and the Dauphin had seen himself drawing ever nearer and nearer to the throne. Saint-Simon, with his inveterate hostility to the Duc, alleges that he "quaked" at the state of affairs. He feared lest his ambitions should be overthrown, though he dared not allow his apprehensions to become apparent. The Duchess railed at his prudence and his precautions, calling them *misères de faiblesse*. There were many matters that he never divulged to her for fear of her passionate outbreaks. "She treated him as though he were a slave," Saint-Simon tells us, "driving him onward as with the lash of a whip." She never lost sight of her principal aim, and was only partly taken up with her court at Sceaux. At night after her candles were put out she would lie awake for hours together, allowing her mind to run riot in dreams of power and dominion. Easily piqued on the score of etiquette, she used to fall out with the Court of Versailles about the merest trifles.

<sup>1</sup> It was the Duc du Maine who had advised his mother to quit the Court. He had even had all her effects removed to Paris and her furniture thrown out of window so that it would be impossible for her to return again to Versailles (Boisjourdain, "Mémoires," vol. i., page 68).

At the signing of the marriage settlement of Chamillart's son with Mademoiselle de Mortemart she refused to walk behind Mademoiselle de Bourbon her niece, "the King," reports Dangeau, "not having decided up to then which of them was to have precedence."

But despite these pettinesses she was more of a patriot than any of the diletante, frivolous throng that surrounded her. People had seen how enthusiastic she had waxed over the successes of the French arms whose glory, long under a cloud during the wars of the Spanish Succession, had shone forth again after the victory of Almanza to shed a new lustre over the House of Bourbon. When she heard the praises that were being lavished on Berwick's victory and subsequently on that of Villars at Denain, she lamented that her husband's name did not figure in the dispatches from the scene of action.

The Duc du Maine began to feel that his reputation was being eclipsed by that of his younger brother<sup>1</sup> who at the battle of Malaga in 1704 had displayed on his flagship a calm, imperturbable courage, never flinching, though most of his attendants fell dead at his side. The Duchess was not insensible to glory. In 1710 we find her writing to the Duc de Vendôme, who was then on his Spanish campaign, a letter couched throughout in terms of affected humility, of which we append the following extract :—

Had it been as easy for me to write a beautiful letter as it is for you to set Kings on their thrones again, what happy thoughts I should be sending you on the great news that is reaching us from Villa-Viciosa. But I am far from possessing so rare an ability, and it is easier for you to win a battle than for me to indite a telling phrase. Moreover, I have a timely

<sup>1</sup> At all events as Grand Master of Artillery, the Duc discharged his delicate functions with conscientiousness. In the du Bourg papers in the Arsenal Library there is abundant proof of his punctilious attention to his duties as commander.



recollection of the saying, "A grands seigneurs pas de paroles." and the greatest seigneurs of all are, in my opinion, those who are truly brave.

In penning these chivalrous lines, Madame du Maine was probably thinking rather of her grandfather than of her husband. Nevertheless, though not a hero, the Duc du Maine was not lacking in love of his country. He on his side unburdened his soul to Madame de Maintenon. His letter of the 1st June 1709 reveals his consternation at the thought of the King being asked to hand over Bayonne and Perpignan to the Dutch. "As soon as I was up," he wrote, "I wanted to go to you and give vent to all my pent-up troubles and anxieties." Next day he is back again on the same theme. "Certainly, Madame, war is one of God's scourges, above all when one is obliged to go on in the position to which we are reduced. But the insolence of our enemies gives us no alternative." Such high-minded ideas would have carried more weight had the Duc du Maine seconded them by departing for the front himself. Instead of that he continued to content himself with writing on military topics, and displayed anxiety, in his correspondence, regarding the future of the officers under his command. He was also guilty of a piece of nepotism on behalf of his second son the Comte d'Eu who was still in infancy.

In 1709 an event of great moment took place in the House of Condé. This was nothing less than the death of Monsieur le Prince. The disposal of his property was to give rise to legal disputes, and to bring about deep dissensions among the members of his family. It was on the 1st April that Henri Jules succumbed to the nervous malady that had been sapping his strength for years. Moreover, the son of Condé the Great was the victim of a kind of dementia, the prelude to his melancholy end.

All the family had gathered round him at the Hôtel

de Condé except the little Comte de Charolais and the du Maine children. When the summons came the Duchess was at Sceaux preparing to give a grand ball. This was immediately cancelled, and she reached Versailles the same evening and proceeded thence to the Arsenal. The Duc du Maine and the Comte de Toulouse went to convey the intelligence to the King. Punctilious as ever about matters of etiquette, His Majesty at once fixed the rank of the princesses. "Madame du Maine merely retained the position she held before her marriage,"<sup>1</sup> a decision which occasioned her great displeasure. On the 10th, when all the princes and princesses came in their robes of state to make obeisance to the King, she alone absented herself, pleading a sudden indisposition. Nevertheless, she was well enough to receive the King's messengers at the Arsenal, as well as the Queen of England, the Duc and Duchesse d'Orléans and the Dowager Princesse de Conti. Thereafter she went to pay her duty to her mother, Madame la Princesse. "Anne of Bavaria," says Saint-Simon, "had every reason to be pleased with her daughter's language and bearing on this sad occasion." Monsieur le Prince, however, was but little mourned by anyone, less perhaps by his daughter Madame du Maine than by any other member of his family, so harsh had been his treatment of her in her childhood.

The day after the Prince's death, his heart was borne to the Church of the Jesuits in the Rue Saint Antoine, the Duc, at his wife's request, being present at the ceremony. The King was at Marly. As soon as he returned to Versailles the Duchess went to call on him attired in her state robes in conformity with the rules of etiquette. The King received her in his cabinet with much kindness. She also visited Madame la Duchesse who was confined to her bed.

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Souches."

Next day the King's review took place in the courtyard of the Château of Versailles, and the Duc du Maine appeared on a charger caparisoned in black. The Duchess arrived from Paris in the evening. Saint-Simon brags of having gone to meet her "with his retinue," and then of having visited her "in state," this notwithstanding the fact that he had never so much as set foot in the Château of Sceaux. She was suffering from an attack of dysentery, but had sufficiently recovered on the morrow to see the King who, as had recently happened in the case of the death of the Prince de Conti, was received by her in bed in accordance with the customary ceremonial. Saint-Simon accompanied the King and, the visit over, re-conducted him as far as the great gallery of the Palace of Versailles.

Monsieur le Prince, as was natural enough, left the bulk of his property to his only son, Louis III., to the detriment of his sisters. To him went the immense estates of Chantilly, Saint-Maur, etc., while the married daughters only had two hundred thousand livres each. "These provisions," says Dangeau, "were anything but satisfactory to the Princesse de Conti and Madame du Maine." Madame la Princesse had rights over the property to the extent of six or seven millions. A fierce and protracted lawsuit was the outcome of these clauses. On the one side was the Duc Louis III., who was destined never to assume the title of Prince de Condé, and on the other the Princesse de Conti, his eldest sister, and associated with her the Duc and Duchesse du Maine. While Madame de Conti voiced her grievances for all to hear, the du Maines manœuvred in secret with the view of winning supporters to their side and of putting themselves well with the public on the grounds that they enjoyed "the tacit affection of the King."

Had this suit merely involved a question of money, it would possess no interest for the historian, but it gave

rise to an important dispute in regard to a matter of rank which augmented the gravity of the quarrel. In laying a request before Parliament, the Duc du Maine usurped the title and privileges of a prince of the blood. He considered that he derived ample justification for this procedure from the duly registered decree which had granted to him and to his heirs the right to inherit the Crown. Had he foreseen to what lengths this action was to lead him, there is no doubt he would have carefully abstained from it. Monsieur le Duc was furious and found an ally in his nephew, the new Prince de Conti, although in the lawsuit he had interests in common with Monsieur du Maine. The two personages whose prerogatives had been assailed demanded that the title of prince of the blood, wrongfully assumed by their brother-in-law and cousin, should be set aside by a court of law. But the day went against them. The First President of the Parliament, de Mesmes, was a friend of the du Maines and this court returned a verdict in their favour. Monsieur le Duc, however, had but a short time longer to live. He died on the night of Shrove Tuesday 1710, in a sort of epileptic fit, the event causing a tremendous commotion in the Hôtel de Condé. The Duc du Maine, in a memoir that has recently seen the light, recounts that his wife was at Sceaux, and that although she had been apprised of her brother's sudden illness she had been unable to set out for Paris since she was not only indisposed herself, but had sent off all her carriage-horses to fetch a party of guests with whom she was intending to enliven the evening. As he had an equipage of his own at Versailles, he dispatched it at once to bring her away. She arrived in Paris in the afternoon and dashed off to Madame la Duchesse "who was very pleased with the way she spoke to her and approvingly mentioned it to the Duc du Maine in the evening." This was the last time the members of the

family were destined to show any friendliness to one another.<sup>1</sup>

This second tragic event in the house of Condé, following as it did so close upon the first, had the momentary effect of smoothing over the matters in dispute. Louis XIV. promptly took advantage of the occasion to extend the rank of prince of the blood to the children of the Duc du Maine,<sup>2</sup> "The King," we are told by Dangeau, "when conferring this honour on his son, spoke to him in the kindest and wisest manner possible."

The whole family were filled with joy. The King further promised the Duc du Maine that the command of the Swiss Guards should descend to his eldest son the Prince des Dombes, and that his younger son, the Comte d'Eu, should succeed him as Grand Master of Artillery. Thereupon a crowd of courtiers tumbled over each other to shower their congratulations on the Duc and his wife. As a consequence of the arrangements regarding the rank of the various members of the Royal Family, the Prince des Dombes, the eldest son of the Duc du Maine, took his place on his father's right, below the Duc de Berry.

Despite the fact that she was mourning the loss of her father and brother, Madame du Maine came to offer her congratulations to the King on the occasion of the marriage of his grandson Berry. She never let slip an opportunity of ingratiating herself with the monarch, and kept urging her husband not to slacken the bonds of intimacy between himself and his father. The Duc du Maine did not fail to carry out this injunction. While his wife was playing the queen at Sceaux, he was a most assiduous attendant at Versailles, accompanying the King wherever he went, to Trianon, Marly or Fontaine-

<sup>1</sup> "Trois mémoires du Duc du Maine," published by Boislisle.

<sup>2</sup> By decree dated 17th March 1710. "Sourches," vol. xii., p. 172.

bleau. He possessed the art of convincing him that he cared little about the court, and that he was interested in nothing or no one but his royal father. When he was not with the King he lived an uncouth life, alone with his fowling-piece or his books, studying or writing. But he managed to see the King in private once every day, playing the dutiful son, the admiring offspring of a glorious sire. Amiable and amusing, he knew how to entertain the old monarch. He also showed great attentiveness to Madame de Maintenon whose Benjamin he still remained, confiding in her his plans and hopes, asking her counsel, and leaning for support on this staunch ally. The King loved him more dearly than the Comte de Toulouse.<sup>1</sup> The two brothers had but little in common, and Monsieur de Toulouse detested his sister-in-law, the Duchesse du Maine, whose extravagances greatly annoyed him.

In his relations with the King, Monsieur du Maine carried assiduity to the point of indiscretion. When in His Majesty's closet he kept his eyes on the letters, his great object being to find out anything that had a bearing on the fortunes of his own house. Occasionally this sort of thing grated on Louis XIV. One day, for example, a dispatch arrived from the Marquis de Torcy, in Holland. Monsieur du Maine pounced on it to open it, and received rather a severe rebuke. "So you're another of my inquisitive friends, always on the look-out for news," says the King. "I know nothing about this matter myself yet, the dispatches have not been deciphered." And the King's bastard patiently waited for them to be decoded. But on the whole he had nothing to complain about; he knew that he enjoyed special privileges.

<sup>1</sup> "He was a very short man," says Saint-Simon, "but the very impersonation of honour, uprightness and fairness, with a bearing as gracious as a natural but icy coldness of manner would allow . . . Nervous with the King . . . Thoroughly bent on knowing all about the naval and mercantile marine . . . Monsieur du Maine was envious of him."

He usually attended the receptions at Marly, to which it was a great distinction to have the entrée. Meanwhile the Duchess remained at Sceaux where in 1710 she brought about the marriage of her sister and the Duc de Vendôme.

At this time victory had not entirely deserted our armies. Vendôme was on the way home from Spain crowned with the laurels of his great triumph at Villaviciosa. On his return to Versailles he drew together a cabal of which the Duc du Maine formed a part. Their common bastardy brought them together, and Monsieur du Maine endeavoured to get Vendôme into favour with the King. He was an unattractive, unsympathetic sort of man. However, the Duc du Maine, supported by his wife in the matter, thought he would make a capital husband for the Duchess's younger sister who, since her father's death, had passed a good deal of her time at Sceaux. She had had a most unhappy experience of life beneath the paternal roof, and was therefore easily satisfied in regard to a husband.

So far as outward appearances went, she was destitute of attractions, being almost a dwarf and ugly, "even sickeningly ugly"—this is Saint-Simon again—but "prudent, sensible, and a Christian," said the Duc du Maine in a letter which he wrote to Madame de Maintenon in order to bring out his sister-in-law's strong points. Madame la Princesse was opposed to the marriage, not without good reason, and Madame du Maine had to put her foot down. Saint-Simon held that the aim of the Duchess was to give an added status to the bastard family. Be that as it may, the wedding took place at Sceaux on the 15th May 1710, the Archbishop of Aix officiating.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The marriage "took place with the approval of all the family, without ceremony or fête and with no special outlay, in my house at Sceaux, while the Court was at Marly. The King and the Royal Family put their signatures to the contract." Letter written by the Duc du Maine.

The poets of Chantilly, Anet, the Temple, and Sceaux chanted the Bridal Song. The alliance formed the subject of many a jest, and was mercilessly lampooned by Madame la Duchesse, the pretty jester of the Condé family. Her estimate of the match did not greatly err. No long time afterwards the newly-wedded couple were obliged to separate, and Cardinal Alberoni—busying himself about what did not concern him—was in a position to write :

He (Monsieur de Vendôme) has promised that on the 22nd of this month he will be at his own Anet, and without his wife. You will be surprised to hear this, but you must know that French marriages are almost all on the same footing. Husbands and wives here go about and do as they please. People say it is not right that a man and a woman should be hampered in their movements simply because they are married. After all, I don't know whether it is reason or mere libertinism that makes them behave as they do.

Neither one of the contracting parties was in love with the other ; such a union was a pure matter of business from which each side hoped to reap some advantage. Monsieur de Vendôme had his eye on the support of the Condés and the du Maines. The chief attraction for Mademoiselle d'Enghien was the prospect the marriage afforded of a husband endowed with a rich rent-roll. She would not die an old maid like Mademoiselle de Condé ! Madame du Maine was a great match-maker. For some women of the world—particularly those who have nothing to do—match-making is not merely a means of doing a service, it is a pastime. Possibly the little Duchess was of the same opinion as La Grande Mademoiselle, who used to proclaim a preference for marriages which were arranged by common-sense rather than by Cupid. In 1700 she had married her maid of honour, Mademoiselle de Lussan, to the Duke of Albemarle. In 1709 Mademoiselle de Moras was, owing to her manœuvres,



led to the altar by the Duc de Villers-Branças, an occasion which was celebrated by a brilliant fête. Madame de Staal reports that the marriage of Mademoiselle de Ligne to the Marquis de Chambonas was also engineered by the Duchess. That wedding took place at the Arsenal. Up to now the Duchess had brought luck to the brides and bridegrooms—it was not so for Mademoiselle d'Enghien and the Duc de Vendôme.

On the 7th June 1711 the Duc du Maine was at Marly with Madame la Duchesse and Mesdemoiselles de Bourbon and de Charolais. He nearly died there. After a run with the staghounds, he had returned and eaten a good supper, and had appeared in excellent spirits in the King's cabinet. In the middle of the night, however, he was taken with a sort of cerebral congestion, and for three hours remained unconscious and in convulsions. They nursed him and gave him every imaginable drug to bring him round again as well as various kinds of emetics. This energetic treatment induced vomiting which saved his life. He awoke as from a trance and rapidly recovered. The King, with his habitual attentiveness, frequently visited the patient at Marly. The Duchess had remained at Sceaux amid her fêtes. She had had the vapours and had been in dread of apoplexy ever since the Marquis de Langeron had died of it in her presence. When she heard of her husband's illness—they did not tell her how serious it was—she exclaimed that she should die if she saw him in such a condition, and never quitted her palace.

She seemed to have a return of affection for her husband when she learned what a narrow escape from death he had had, and she gives a somewhat effusive expression to her feelings in a letter to Madame de Maintenon :

I know perfectly well that I shall lose what little reason I have unless God, who in His mercy on me and my children,

has just restored my husband to life, vouchsafes to place my spirit in a calmer setting.<sup>1</sup>

Then, passing suddenly to the subject of her husband—from one anxiety to another—she continues :

You love Monsieur le Duc du Maine, Madame ; you have a mother's tenderness for him. You will therefore the more readily forgive the anxieties of a wife who trembles for his welfare. . . . I cannot see without a shudder Monsieur du Maine breathing an air of which so many fatal events betray the injurious qualities. . . . Nevertheless, I know, Madame, that he would rather lose his life a thousand times than dream for a moment of leaving the King's side. Whatever risks he may have to run by remaining at Versailles, he will certainly allow nothing to affect his determination unless, with your truly maternal devotion, you intervene to make him come away. Release us, I pray you, from this cruel anxiety.<sup>2</sup>

It was not merely the injurious air of Versailles or Marly that the Duchess had in mind. She was beginning to cut herself off more and more from the Court, preferring to be Queen at Sceaux than merely one of the princesses in the King's entourage, and she therefore suffered the Duc, who was frequently summoned thither by his numerous duties, to go alone. Steadily and surely he had pursued his way, making certain of his advancement. He was now a Peer of France and officially recognized as a prince of the blood, nor was he afraid of taking at public functions the place to which his rank entitled him.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "I can easily imagine the joy you must have felt on learning of my convalescence" (the Duc du Maine to the Comte du Bourg) Marly, 27th June, 1711. "Papiers du Bourg, Lettres diverses," vol. i. fo. 50, Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal.

<sup>2</sup> Letter No. XXVI., from the Duchesse du Maine, Sceaux, 11th February 1712, to Madame de Maintenon.

<sup>3</sup> On the 24th April 1712 was observed at Saint Denis the anniversary of the Dauphin's death. The Prince de Conti, the Duc du Maine, and the Comte d'Eu were present. This was, according to Sourches, the first funeral ceremony in which the Duchesse du Maine allowed her son

The sudden deaths of the Dauphin,<sup>1</sup> the Duchesse de Bourgogne<sup>2</sup> and the Duc de Berry following so closely one upon another, had cleared the pathway to the throne. When the shadows of the tomb began to close around the splendours of the Roi-Soleil, the successor to the crown was but a feeble babe in swaddling clothes. A regency seemed inevitable, and that at no distant date. Saint-Simon does not scruple to insinuate that these tragic events suggested new possibilities to the Duc du Maine, the other princes of the blood being too young to be of any account. "Monsieur du Maine," he writes, "had only Monsieur le Duc (Henri Louis de Bourbon, son of Louis III.) to fear, and he was then barely twenty years of age. Madame la Princesse dared not offer any

to take part. The 3rd October, the King, going to Rambouillet, took with him the Duc du Maine, the Duchesse de Bourbon and her two daughters ("Mémoires de Souches," vol. xiii. p. 505), Versailles, 11th May 1712. The Duc du Maine announced to the Duc de Noailles that the King had just granted to the Prince des Dombes the reversion of the governorship of Languedoc ("A. E.," France, vol. 141). This volume contains a mass of correspondence that passed between the Duc du Maine and the Maréchal de Noailles, and many letters of recommendation dated generally from Versailles, Marly, or Fontainebleau, rarely from Sceaux, a circumstance which affords a further proof that the Duc passed the greater part of his time about the King.

<sup>1</sup> The Duc du Maine himself has recorded in a note that has remained in manuscript, some personal details relating to the Dauphin's death. "In the afternoon, we went to Sceaux, Madame la Duchesse and I. . . . The King had already set out for Marly. Forthwith I cast myself down at the bedside, shocked and overcome, not only with the cruel sadness of the news but also with its suddenness. I sent for Malézieu and we both of us went to tell the Duchess of the terrible event that had occurred. The whole household was astir, and no one thought of sleep the whole night through. "A. E.," 20th April 1711: Madame du Maine went to present her compliments at Versailles, "Mercure de France, Journal de Breteuil," Saint-Simon).

<sup>2</sup> Save by the former cabal of Meudon and the little court which the Duchesse du Maine used to gather round her at Sceaux, the Duc and Duchesse de Bourgogne were sincerely mourned. Vide "La Duchesse de Bourgogne et l'Alliance savoyarde," by the Comte d'Haussonville and "l'Affaire des Poisons," by F. Brentano.

opposition to Louise Bénédicte, her daughter. The field was therefore clear.

The public, dismayed at the threefold disaster that had fallen upon the Royal House, were vaguely inquiring whether the hand of crime had not been busy in these tragic deaths. In a whisper—and not always in a whisper—the name of the Duc d'Orléans was passed from mouth to mouth. The Duc du Maine let the talk go on. Nay, he did not hesitate to lend his aid in associating the name of the Regent with those horrible suspicions; suspicions, however, which occasionally recoiled in the direction of himself and his duchess, but which he promptly flung back on to the shoulders of his brother-in-law. Were these, then, the horrors of a second House of Atreus? The fact that these sinister rumours emanated from Sceaux lends some colour to the charges of hypocrisy so frequently levelled against the Duc du Maine by his detractors. An attempt was made to induce the Duc d'Orléans to challenge him, but the wise counsels of Père Letellier and Madame de Maintenon smoothed the matter over, and put an end to an exchange of accusations as shameful as they were baseless. When passions drive men's minds awry there are no lengths to which they will not go, and sometimes in the riot of their imaginings the spectre of crime itself does not appal them.

To dissipate these odious suspicions Madame du Maine made an elaborate show of grief. She wrote to Madame de Maintenon in terms of sorrow that were perhaps a little overdone, seeing how the way had been cleared for her ambition by the deaths she affected to deplore.

What a disaster, Madame, and what an affliction for the King; what a loss to France and what an overwhelming sorrow for you! I feel it but too keenly, my heart is rent asunder, but it is the thought of you that gives a double edge to my sorrow. Death, entirely unforeseen, has snatched from

you the most amiable of princesses, the work of your own hands, the darling of France. . . .

Madame de Maintenon was only partially convinced of the sincerity of this consolatory eloquence. She retired to her own apartment, there to weep alone<sup>1</sup> and to vex her spirit with vague questionings concerning the crimes which she supposed had been committed. While she cried to the King that he knew well enough whence the blow had come, the Duc du Maine is reported by Saint-Simon to have made great capital out of the public folly. All his tears never blinded him to his own interests. He gave his former governess to understand that his youngest son, the Comte d'Eu, would one day be unprovided for, and gently impressed upon her the necessity of keeping him in the King's mind. As a result Louis made him governor of Guyenne. But there was no satisfying the du Maines. No sooner had they obtained official recognition as princes of the blood than they began, at the risk of exciting manifold hostility, to raise fresh questions of precedence. The Duchess claimed the *pas* over her niece, Mademoiselle de Charolais, the sister of the new Duc de Bourbon (Henri Louis). She met with strenuous opposition on the part of her own mother and Madame de Conti, her sister. In the end it was decided that Mademoiselle de Charolais should enter the King's presence in the wake of her aunt. The only remaining difficulty was in connexion with the daughters of the Duc d'Orléans. The King again decided in favour of the du Maines in order that the public might behold the prerogatives he granted to his bastards. They were to be seen everywhere, they or

<sup>1</sup> The Duchesse d'Orléans in a letter to Madame de Maintenon writes, "I had intended, Madame, to go and mingle my tears with your own, but my brother the Duc du Maine told me that you wish absolutely to be alone with your grief. . . . I only desire to do that which is agreeable to you."

their heirs. On the 10th May 1714 the Prince des Dombes, in company with Monsieur le Duc and the young Prince de Conti, headed the procession at the Duc de Berry's funeral at Saint Denis.

The education of the little Dauphin was entrusted to the Duc du Maine. At this rate the King's household, military or civil, bade fair to be subject to the sole control of the Duc du Maine. In the event of his death his functions were to be assumed by his younger brother, the Comte de Toulouse. But even this was not enough. They extorted from the grief-stricken monarch a declaration dated July 1714 nominating the Duc du Maine, the Comte de Toulouse, and their heirs male, successors to the Throne if the line of the legitimate princes should fail. It further enacted (to the profound indignation of the Dukes and Peers) that they should enjoy the same rank, honours, and privileges as the princes of the blood "next after the said princes." Thus in his dying hours Louis XIV. threw prudence to the winds. He brought the Crown within reach of the elder of his natural sons and deprived his nephew, the Duc d'Orléans, of the chief prerogatives of the Regency in order to confer them on the Duc du Maine.

Madame de Maintenon, as one may guess, was no stranger to these singularly drastic measures. The Duchess, who hated her at heart, displayed on this occasion a somewhat novel warmth of feeling towards her.

I recognize to the full, she wrote, the prodigious favours that this great prince has deigned to shower upon my family. Nor am I ignorant how greatly your affection for the Duc du Maine and my children has contributed thereto. They will therefore learn from my lips to share between yourself and me all the tenderness, all the gratitude and all the respect which children owe to their own mother.

The Regent had been branded as a poisoner, and Louis XIV. had displayed great coldness towards his nephew

after the sudden deaths that had taken place in his family and in the legitimate branch. Madame de Maintenon had done her utmost to maintain him in this frame of mind. The end of Louis XIV. seemed near at hand and the party whose cause she espoused dreaded nothing so much as to see the Regency in the hands of the Duc d'Orléans. It was to prevent this coming to pass that the King decided on those last measures, antagonistic though they were to the natural laws of the kingdom and to the constitution of the French monarchy. When the news was published the courtiers came to pay forced homage to the recipient of all these privileges. At Marly, in the presence of the King, the bastards showed greater reserve. Monsieur du Maine appeared preoccupied and diffident. The future seemed dark with menacing clouds, and it was with misgiving that he called to mind the words his father had spoken the day he signed his Will. "There! I have done what you wished," said the old King, "but I tell you," he added bitterly, "that you will be a nobody when I am gone. You will have to fight your own battles then and maintain, if you can, the position I have given you." He bethought him also of what the King had said to the Duc d'Orléans on the same occasion. "I have entrusted the superintendence of the Dauphin's education to the Duc du Maine, not because I have the slightest lack of confidence in you, but because the laws of the Kingdom allow me no alternative." Such tutorial duties were admirably adapted to a man of his scholarly tastes and peace-loving disposition, who, moreover, had more enemies than friends about him. Nor did it escape him that the position might be a step to higher things. As for the Duchess, she was immeasurably delighted.

The Marquise de Créquy in her *Memoirs* tells the story of a visit she paid to Saint Cyr in 1714, when she found Madame de Maintenon engaged in a tête-à-tête with the

Duchess who was expounding her projects and designs.<sup>1</sup> The picture she gives of Madame du Maine can scarcely be called flattering.

One could not exactly call her crazy, she says, any more than one could say she was deformed. Yet, in her judgment as well as in her figure she betrayed a decided twist. On the day in question her attire was most unbecomingly juvenile. She was wearing a gown with vine leaves in black velvet sprays on a gold ground, and bespangled all over with golden beads, in the necklace, bracelets, girdle, clasps and even in her hair. The Duchesse du Maine and Madame de Maintenon were overwhelmingly polite to each other. Whenever they reached a doorway, Madame de Maintenon took the lead, but only after she had gone through a little pretence of refusal and hesitation which lasted about a quarter of a second. Nothing could have exceeded the delicacy that was exhibited on both sides during these little pieces of manœuvring.

One can imagine the scene. The King greeting them with a smile as they entered, and bowing first to Madame de Maintenon and then to the Duchess. That smile augured well for the fortunes of a princess who left no stone unturned to secure her own advancement, and whose policy in courting the good graces of Madame de Maintenon, whom she hated, was solely dictated by ambition. She knew full well that "the old slattern," as Madame la Palatine used to call her, was more truly a queen than many another who had worn the crown, and that now, when this long reign was drawing to a close, her influence was greater than ever.

Madame de Maintenon had been fortunate enough to procure the insertion of an important clause in the will which the King had made at Marly in 1714. She had insisted that Louis XIV. should take the necessary steps to relieve the bastard princes once and for all

<sup>1</sup> "Souvenirs de la Marquise de Créquy" (Delloye's edition, 1740, p. 128, vol. i.).



of the disqualifications attaching to their birth.<sup>1</sup> The Duchesse du Maine being desirous that her husband should be made acquainted with such provisions of the deed as concerned him, Louis XIV. consented to have them recited to the interested parties on the understanding that they should be kept secret. On these conditions, however, the offer was declined. Hitherto the Duchess had displayed timidity and constraint in the presence of Madame de Maintenon<sup>2</sup> and had deemed it befitting to leave her husband's fortunes in her hands. Now she adopted a bolder attitude. "At all events, the King will declare his intentions regarding the King of Spain?" "No," was Madame de Maintenon's imperturbable reply. This was the Duchess's first disappointment, for it meant that the power would be in the hands of Philippe d'Orléans. She began to be conscious of a turn in the tide of fortune.

Her detestation of the bastards had prompted Madame la Duchesse to make advances to the Duc d'Orléans during the last few weeks of the King's lifetime, and a similar reason had caused the Duc to accept them in order that they might both entrench themselves against the encroachments of Monsieur du Maine.<sup>3</sup>

The Duc du Maine possibly thought it politic to make friendly overtures to his rival. Philippe d'Orléans betrayed a willingness to entertain them. He even conceived the idea of marrying one of his daughters,

<sup>1</sup> The Orleans family hated Madame de Maintenon, attributing to her the marked disfavour into which their chief representative had fallen, and looking on the good fortune of the Duc du Maine as her handiwork.

<sup>2</sup> On the 23rd May 1715, Louis XIV., despite all opposition, conferred on his illegitimate children the title of princes of the blood. "We desire," he said in language that could not be misinterpreted, "that there should be no difference between the princes of the blood royal and our so-called legitimated sons or their descendants born in lawful wedlock." Gaillardin, "Histoire de Louis XIV."

<sup>3</sup> Saint-Simon.

Mademoiselle de Valois, to the Prince des Dombes who was then but fourteen years of age. This young lady, however, had lost her heart to the Duc de Richelieu. She showed no inclination to lend a favourable ear to the maternal arguments for an alliance which from its premature nature ran the risk of incurring the King's disfavour. Monsieur le Duc beamed more amicably than ever on the du Maines. They were soon to grow sick of his friendship. Ere long we shall see him becoming their most redoubtable adversary.

In August 1715, when the King was drawing near his end, the veil was rent asunder before the Duchess's eyes.<sup>1</sup> For a moment she saw into the reality of things. From what a height her dream-castles came tumbling down! The parties that had been brought into being by hostility to her husband, strike terror to her heart and appal her with a premonition of the coming downfall of her house at the very moment when she thought it at the height of its fortunes. And so behold her rushing off to Versailles to Madame de Maintenon "to urge her to throw a light on that which was so important for her to know," that is to say the nature of the new prerogatives that the mysterious will was to confer on the Duc du Maine. She must know about it at all costs; she insists with breathless eagerness in a very fever of curiosity. She positively pushes her husband into the King's apartment. In the royal presence he displays great tact and well dissembled art. The King, moved by no other consideration than the love he bore this fruit of a bygone passion, unfolded to him the vast roll of honours that he was conferring upon him in these, the last days of his life; the command of the Household Troops, the custody and education of the

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur du Maine, says Saint-Simon, saw how the King was failing. Backed up by Madame de Maintenon and the Chancellor, Secretary of State, he hastened on everything which concerned himself.

heir to the throne.<sup>1</sup> Nay, more ; being too ill to attend himself, the King, ignoring the Duc d' Orléans, delegated the task of reviewing the Household Troops to the Duc du Maine. These crowning honours seemed the presage of his fall, and perhaps contributed to hasten its approach." Such was the judicious and philosophic reflection of Madame de Staal, to whose Memoirs we shall frequently recur for details concerning the history of the du Maines during this period, for not only was she one of the most interested observers of the drama, but also one of the most intelligent of the actors who took part in it.

The hopes of the Duchess revived. She flattered herself that every rung removed from the ladder to the throne meant for herself a step higher in the climb to power. The last desire of the King, or rather his last weakness, would perhaps be the means of procuring for his favourite son a predominant position in the coming Regency. What joy for Madame de Maintenon ; what a triumph for the little Duchess ! But excessive good fortune often arouses enmities and jealousies, and public opinion began to be alienated from the du Maines. A veritable deluge of jests and lampoons descended upon them. The Duc's lack of courage and the Duchess's frivolities were held up to ridicule. Even their private life was assailed, and some of the attacks went to the point of calumny. They were victimized in doggerel as malicious as it was indecent.<sup>2</sup> The Duchess was spoken of as

<sup>1</sup> " If anything happens to the Duc du Maine, the Comte de Toulouse will take his place. . . . All the officers of the Guard and the Royal Household will be enjoined to recognise the Duc du Maine's authority, to obey all his commands, in so far as they have reference to their duties, with regard to the person of the little King, his safety and preservation."

<sup>2</sup> See p. 271, " Recueil de Maurepas " (1713).

Quand on voit du Maine et d'Antin,  
On croit être au temps de la fable,  
Où cet adultère Jupin,  
Dans sa débauche détestable,  
Dit aux dieux, d'un ton absolu :  
Recevez Castor et Pollux.

“the modern Penelope.” Her morals were called in question. She was said to have her lovers; Cardinal de Polignac, Président de Mesmes, even her own secretary, Malézieu. Nay, people went the length of accusing her of having had incestuous relations with her brother, since dead, and cited the poetical and gallant correspondence that had passed between Sceaux and Saint-Maur. If the scandalmongers had but known that those verses—there was little enough in them, after all—emanated on the one hand from Malézieu and Genest and on the other from Chaulieu and La Fare, and that the two correspondents had only appended their signatures to these harmless epistles!

We may here fulfil the necessary duty of freeing the memory of the Duchess from those charges of illicit intimacy with President de Mesmes and Cardinal de Polignac which her enemies have laid at her door. The former, although Chief President of the Parliament, was looked upon as a feather-brained individual, who wore his robes as lightly as the gay abbés wore their cloth. Madame du Maine, without regarding him in any other light than as a gay partner in her theatricals at Sceaux, was nevertheless not loth to avail herself of his services to gain the parliamentary support which her cause required. Therein lay the secret of her attentions, and her smiles. As for de Polignac, the “beau Cardinal,” he had something more than his good looks and his fine figure to appeal to the Queen of Sceaux. Madame de Sévigné tells us that he was the most fascinating of men of the world. His knowledge was universal, he could talk on every subject, he exhibited in his manner all the gentleness, all the vivacity, all the easy grace that one could possibly desire in a member of society. Louis XIV. described him as the very personification of persuasive eloquence. The fragments of correspondence between Madame du Maine and himself which have fallen

under the ban of popular suspicion, are in reality the most harmless of Platonic expressions, being just the sort of record of one of those voyages to Cythera's isle that would naturally be suggested by the classical mythology then so much in vogue at Sceaux. There is no meagre probability that the authorship of all the tittle-tattle that found currency in regard to this matter may be ascribed to the Regent's mother, the sworn enemy of Madame du Maine, to whom we are indebted for the following spiteful missive which is purely and simply the creature of her malevolent imagination :

My son has shown me a letter written by Madame du Maine to Cardinal de Polignac which was seized among his papers. She is indeed a most worthy and virtuous person ! " We are going to the country to-morrow," she writes, " I shall arrange the apartments so that your room will be next to mine. Try to do as well as you did last time and we shall be in the seventh heaven." <sup>1</sup>

What may be safely affirmed is that de Polignac's characteristics were eminently adapted to ensure his success in the new Hôtel de Rambouillet. Moreover, at the end of the reign of Louis XIV., affairs of state presented a much greater interest to Madame du Maine than affairs of the heart. There sparkled within this little pygmy body, this miniature edition of the mighty Condé, flashes of the same unquenchable political fire. It will not have been forgotten how in 1714 she summoned two Dukes, La Force and d'Aumont, to Sceaux in connexion with the *affaire du bonnet* with the idea of taking the wind out of their sails. Saint-Simon shall describe the scene for us :

Madame du Maine, he says, receives them with all the politeness in the world. With scarce an interval she conducts them to her own apartments and opens fire. She begins with

<sup>1</sup> Duchesse d'Orléans, " Correspondance complète," Charpentier, 1855.

a somewhat insidious preamble. "After all the honours the King has recently lavished upon Monsieur du Maine, particularly that which qualifies him to succeed to the throne, there is nothing further to wish for. But he may have to apprehend the antagonism of the Dukes and Peers. His chief desire is to enjoy in peace all that has been granted to him." Up to that point, matters had gone well enough. The two Dukes had held their peace. Perceiving them thus docile, the Duchess makes so bold as to ask for an assurance in writing that after the King's death they will uphold all that His Majesty had done in his lifetime on behalf of his natural children as touching not only their rank, but also their right of succession to the Crown. But here the Duc de la Force plucks up enough courage to stammer out a few words of protest. Scarcely had he made his meaning clear when the Duchess broke in with a storm of abuse and threats. "I always thought as much," she cried, "the Dukes are merely casting about to find a way out. But I tell you that the King would take it well of you to write what I ask of you. Monsieur du Maine can vouch for that." "Well then, where's the risk?" says d'Aumont with a glance at La Force. "The King, that may be," retorted the latter, "but who will answer for the parliament? Would not the Chief President be more jealous than the King if he beheld us confirming what has already received the formal sanction of parliament? Madame," he said in conclusion, "the matter is too delicate; not one of us would dare to take the risk." Madame du Maine was mad with wrath and showed it in her countenance. Her intention was either to make sure of their support or to ruin them with the King. The Duc d'Aumont, she thought, had already nearly capitulated, and she therefore brought all her eloquence to bear on the Duc de la Force. At last, seeing that all her efforts were vain and finding herself at the end of her arguments, she could restrain her wrath no longer, but broke up the conference saying, "When one has once obtained the right to succeed to the throne, one must set fire to the four corners of the Kingdom and to the centre as well rather than let it be torn away." Then she rose abruptly, and courteously dismissed her interlocutors who, in spite of the heat of the discussion, withdrew with many compliments and inclinations of the head. They had seen in the Duchess the shade of her

grandfather, and knew she would allow herself no rest till she had put her threat into execution.

Great was the indignation of Saint-Simon, who declares that the audacity displayed by the Duchess towards the Dukes and Peers surpassed the wildest flights of imagination. He was not less wroth with the Duc du Maine over the *affaire du bonnet*, "provoked," he tells us, "beyond endurance by his duplicity and his unmerited influence." He alleges that Monsieur du Maine broke faith with the Dukes, making them the plaything of the Parliament and the laughing-stock of the world at large. It must be confessed that these paltry quarrels which so deeply affected the author of the "Mémoires," leave us rather cold to-day. Yet they were the very pivot on which the courtier's life revolved. There was a rather violent scene about this matter between the fearsome Duke and Monsieur du Maine. Saint-Simon gives himself the airs of a sort of Public Prosecutor while his adversary is represented as cowering beneath him "pale and abashed." "Make the most of your powers and of all that you have obtained. But know that to every man there comes a time when, however great he may be, he repents, too late, of having devoted his might to an unworthy use."

We may well doubt whether the author of the "Mémoires" would have given his insolence quite so much rein as to employ such language to the Duc du Maine—"to make him stammer" as he puts it—at a time when the latter still enjoyed the support of the great King. He affirms that after the *affaire du bonnet* the du Maines assiduously fanned the flames of civil discord, knowing that their own safety lay in setting the various factions by the ears. The situation was strained, but the country as a whole remained indifferent to these paltry squabbles.

Then, again, the lawsuit in connection with the inheritance of Monsieur le Prince engendered interminable

troubles among the heirs. Shortly before his death Monsieur le Duc Louis III. addressed a letter to the King, begging him to put an end to the claims that Monsieur du Maine was urging against his daughters, adding that it would be a cause of never-ending estrangement between Monsieur du Maine and himself. "The King," he says, "told me that he was convinced of the justice of my position, and that he would end the matter immediately."

Nevertheless the Duc du Maine carried the day. A verdict in his favour and in that of his partners in the action was formally pronounced by Parliament. Elated with his triumph, he humbly sought his mother-in-law, and assured her that he was unable to rejoice over an event fraught with so much displeasure for Madame la Duchesse. The latter, considering his conduct dishonourable, refused to receive him. With a violence equal to Madame du Maine's, she flew into a passion, flung herself on her bed, and would see no one the whole day. Her supporters breathed fire and fury against the Duc du Maine. They went about everywhere repeating that their adversary had resorted to the most unworthy means to work on the minds of the judges. The weak are more often sinned against than sinning. The poor prince had been but a tool in his wife's hands.

In the final settlement of the inheritance question, he showed, despite his triumph at the courts, an accommodating spirit towards his nephew Henri Louis de Bourbon Condé, the new Duc. Unfortunately, in a public document he assumed the style of prince of the blood. *Inde irae!* This was considered a piece of insolence by the Condés, evoked a strenuous protest from Monsieur le Duc, and completed the estrangement between Chantilly and Sceaux. Henceforth there was war, a desperate pen and ink strife, in the House of Condé that continued till the du Maines became embroiled in another quarrel with the House of Orleans.



## CHAPTER VII

The Spanish party in 1715—The Duchesse du Maine at the King's death-bed—Parliamentary session of the 2nd September 1715—Decree of the 15th September—Change of attitude in the Queen of Sceaux—The question of the legitimated princes—The Duc de Bourbon's manœuvres against the Duc du Maine—Edict of deprivation against the Bastards (2nd July 1717)—Madame de Maintenon's grief—The Prince des Dombes in Hungary—The Duchesse du Maine rushes into revolt—Moderation of the Duc du Maine and the Comte de Toulouse—Madame du Maine's interview with the Duchesse d'Orléans—Edict reducing the rank of the illegitimate children (August 1718)

**T**HE policy of Louis XIV. at the conclusion of his reign was to effect a union between the two branches of the House of Bourbon. But he had counted without the ambition of Philip V. In the event of the King's death the Spanish Ambassador at Paris had secret instructions to put forward his master's claim to the crown of France. In his despatches to the Court of Madrid, Cellamare placed the legitimated princes at the head of the list of those who might be relied on to declare for the Spanish King. The agent Castejo wrote as follows to Cardinal Alberoni : " The Duc du Maine is bound to have the considerable rank and influence to which his wisdom and his popularity entitle him." What an illusion was there ! Another agent, the Abbé Mascara, referred to Madame de Maintenon as the implacable enemy of the Duc d'Orléans. He had long ago announced that Monsieur du Maine would be entrusted with the guardianship and education of the Dauphin, but gifted with greater penetration than

Castejo he had the common-sense to observe, "Once the King is dead, men's actions and words will be guided by the wishes of the Duc d'Orléans. If the legitimated princes are reduced to playing some very minor part, they are sure to become the leaders of the Spanish party at the Court of France. There is nothing to be gained from Madame de Maintenon. The Comte de Toulouse is well-disposed, but he is by nature very reserved, and stands in great awe of the King. The Duc du Maine seems less to be relied on owing to the fact that he has solicited the hand of Mademoiselle de Valois, the daughter of the Duc d'Orléans, on behalf of his son the Prince des Dombes. As the most diverse interpretations are put upon his conduct, no advances must be made in his direction without precaution."

The whole question of supremacy in France depended for its solution on the fortunes of two people, the Duc d'Orléans and Philip V. If Louis appointed his grandson the King of Spain as Regent, the latter would in his turn select the Duc du Maine to act for him. We have seen, however, that the old King had not allowed the promptings of his paternal affections to interfere with his duties as a sovereign so far as to exclude his nephew from the regency,—“the Vestibule of the Throne,” as it has been called. The Marquis de Lassay, a partisan of the ex-Court, thus sums up the position of affairs at the death of Louis XIV.:

The Duc du Maine is uncertain, but he is under the influence of his wife, on whom every hope may be placed. If King Philip V. will only map out a line of conduct for them, he will find that they can bring about the triumph of his cause. . . . What, concludes this spokesman of the Spanish faction, what else is necessary? The provincial governors and the military commanders must be won over, and a French army corps must be maintained in Spain ready to support Philip V. on his entry into France. The other regiments would swiftly rally to him.

It was to be a harder task than that.

The confident air worn by the Duc d'Orléans up to the date of the King's death rather suggested that he relied on the provisions of the King's will. Anxious as she was to further the interests of the Duc du Maine, Madame de Maintenon, who may have been acted upon by the Princesse des Ursins, betrayed no corresponding eagerness to assist the cause of Spain, though she was too clever to imagine that her protégé could command preference over the Duc d'Orléans unless it were as the deputy of Philip V. Nevertheless she was regarded as the most powerful prop of the du Maine party. On the 31st August 1715, the Duchess is depicted by Dangeau as hurrying away to the King's death-bed at Versailles, thrusting her spoke into all the nursing arrangements, and urging them to doctor him with a certain pet remedy that had never been found of any use except in cases of smallpox. Her humour did not desert her even then. "Since there's nothing more to be done," she said, "it would be better that the King should die after taking this cure than without having taken it at all." A few hours later the Monarch had breathed his last, and the Duc and Duchesse du Maine were outpouring their grief in the bosom of Madame de Maintenon. "We have fallen from the clouds, Madame," wrote the Duc, "fallen into a new world, or rather into a state of chaos." The Duchess was fain to mingle her tears with Madame de Maintenon's. The sorrow she expressed at the death of her royal father-in-law, coupled with her fulsome gratitude for all they owed to his morganatic widow, shows that her eloquence was not altogether un-inspired by personal interest. One cannot but prefer the simpler and loftier tone of the sentiments expressed on the same occasion by that faithful and sincerely devout woman the Duchess's mother, Madame la Princesse :

I forbore to write to you before, Madame, for deeply as I felt your grief, I respected it as deeply. . . . I believe, Madame, that Monsieur le Duc du Maine has told you that he is no longer at law with Monsieur le Duc. I trust that this suspension of hostilities will bring all of them together again. With all my heart I hope it may. If I could see my family united, I should regard my work in this world as over. What happiness to cut oneself off from it entirely ! but, for that, one must have your courage, your sorrows and your virtues.

Louis' inordinate affection for his irregular offspring has found few apologists. However, a writer<sup>1</sup> who has occupied himself with the history of the period, offers the following free-and-easy explanation :—

Is not this preference, he asks, which every man exhibits for his natural children due to the charm of sentimental recollection. A man's wife is chosen for him ; his mistresses he chooses for himself.

There assuredly we have an idea as false as it is immoral. At any rate, such a predilection would have brought about civil war in France if Philippe d'Orléans had not promptly seized the reins of government. Undoubtedly the King's death brought the Duc du Maine nearer to the throne, but what a world of skill would have been necessary to enable him to reach it ! "Does anyone forget," says Madame de Staal, "that, how powerful soever a King may be, his might extends not beyond the tomb ? Weary of rendering obedience, men readily neglect the observance of laws that have no living power behind them." Madame du Maine recognised instinctively that her cause was in danger. At Sceaux one day the Duc came in triumph to show her a verse translation he had just completed of a canto of Cardinal de Polignac's *Anti-Lucrèce*, which had so greatly roused her enthusiasm when its author used to read it to her. But it was now no longer the burning question of the moment, and she

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur de Chateauneuf.



B. LVIGIXIV.

Tra i Rè Christiani **CHRISTIANISSIMO**. Terzo i  
Monarchi c'hanno meritato il Titolo di **GRANDE**.  
Secondo di **GIUSTO**. Primo d'**INVINCIBILE**.



could not restrain her impatience. "You will see," she said to her husband, "one fine day you will wake up and find yourself an academician, and Monsieur d'Orléans Regent of France." Before this unlooked-for and vehement outburst the Duc retired discomfited.

Philippe d'Orléans was prepared to go to any lengths rather than submit to the clauses of the will which entrusted the young King's person to the care of the Duc du Maine. His honour was at stake, and such provisions would be regarded as proof of those poisoning suspicions of which he scorned to take notice. The day after the King's death, Philippe proceeded to the Palace with an armed following, prepared to have himself declared Regent before the King's will was opened. As every article was recited, the audience listening with great respect, Chief President de Mesmes, Monsieur du Harlay's successor, said in a loud voice, "Observe, Messieurs, this is our law." The enumeration of the favours granted to the Duc du Maine by the codicil to the royal will excited low murmurs of dissatisfaction among those present. Monsieur du Maine grew pale. The new Duc de Bourbon claimed the office of Grand Master, and declared himself independent of his uncle, "whom he would not obey." This young noble it was who achieved a melancholy notoriety as the lover of the Marquise de Prie, and as Louis XV.'s unhappy adviser. Even now he was beginning to display the egoism, the selfishness and the obstinacy of his disposition. His adversary was an abler though a weaker man than himself. In Parliament the Duc du Maine could only count on the influence of the Chief President, that irresponsible courtier who commanded as little respect as a magistrate as he inspired awe as an antagonist. The Duc begged Monsieur de Mesmes not to allow him to become a mere cipher, stripped of all authority and with no duties to perform. In accordance with the decision pronounced by Parliament on the 15th

September, he was appointed superintendent of the King's education, though without any authority over his nephew the Duc de Bourbon, who remained Grand Master of the Royal Household. It was a case of give and take. The Duc de Bourbon and the Duc du Maine were admitted simultaneously to the Council.<sup>1</sup> Monsieur du Maine retained his regiment and the command of the Artillery, but he no longer had the direction of the establishment of Louis XV., nor the guardianship of the little King. All the power was handed over to the Regent.

The Duchesse du Maine, who had all this time remained at Sceaux surrounded by her court, had been in a fool's paradise regarding the probable results of the Parliamentary sitting. She could not believe that the provisions of the great King's will would be so roughly set aside. Her idea was that the superintendence of the Child King's education, which would be in the hands of her husband, would be a sufficient check on the power of Philippe d'Orléans, whom she conceived as merely nominally exercising the functions of Regent, and as being perpetually obliged to defer to the wishes of the two legitimated princes. "She never counted on the Regent being so firm or the Duc du Maine so weak." Judge, then, of her stupefaction when her husband came back to Sceaux to tell her the fatal news, and of her indignation when she learned that he had never so much as uttered a word in defence of his rights!

No sooner had she realised what had happened than she sent all her votaries packing, and bade farewell to poetry and belles-lettres. Adieu, ye muses of Sceaux! And away they flew, swiftly and suddenly as startled swallows. For some time past the Princess had been mixed up with financiers in connexion with her lawsuit; now she was about to take the fatal step of entangling

<sup>1</sup> The Duc du Maine's place therein was opposite the Regent. (Saint-Simon, "Mémoires," p. 521.)



herself with politicians, and of rebelling against the government. This was to cost her dear.

She had felt that her interests demanded that she should have her agents in Parliament, and above all that she should gain the support of its leaders, who, by reason of their position, were men of high importance in the State. Thus it was that Presidents de Maison and de Blamont were won over to the cause of the legitimated princes. As for the Chief President, we have seen him passing a great part of his time at Sceaux; he was a whole-hearted supporter of the Duchess's cause. What a transformation the events of a few weeks had wrought in her! She is no longer the gracious and witty Queen of Sceaux, but a little nervous, restless princess, forever giving vent to recriminations and complaints. The anxieties which the King's death bequeathed her, robbed her of her slumbers even more than the *Grandes Nuits*, and in the course of her long vigils she could talk to her *lectrice* of nothing but revolution. From time to time she went to unburden herself to Madame de Maintenon, who was rather at a loss to know how she ought to receive such dangerous confidences.

Madame la Palatine urged the Regent to strip the du Maines of all their distinctions and prerogatives. In her rough German way she upbraided him for being allied to "such a rascally crew." He was further urged on by Saint-Simon and Voyer d'Argenson, the Lieutenant of Police and future Keeper of the Seals, a man whose energy recalls the ceaseless activity of Cardinal Richelieu.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de d'Argenson," vol. i. Madame de Maintenon wrote as follows to her niece, Madame de Caylus, in a letter dated 1st January 1716: "I am still in fear for the Duc du Maine. He has but her (the Regent's wife), yourself and me to love him, and his greatest fault is that he was too much beloved by the King." . . . And then: "I never thought that our princes would have withstood Monsieur le Duc, or that the late King's decrees would hold good against the Parliament, which takes both pride and pleasure in abolishing them. . . ."

In their remonstrance of the 22nd August 1716<sup>1</sup> "the first alarm-bell," the princes of the blood, basing their action on an incontestable right, formally protested against the unconstitutional nature of the Declaration of 1715. This "affaire" of the legitimated princes was a *cause célèbre*. If the Regent recognised that the Duc du Maine was his enemy, and that Sceaux was a hot-bed of conspiracy against the Palais Royal, he did not seem greatly affected thereby. He nourished in his bosom none of Saint-Simon's rancour, and thought it natural enough that under the late King the Duc du Maine should have played his parts of courtier and natural son for all they were worth.

Seeing that their prerogatives were threatened, the princes of the blood demanded the appointment of judges or arbitrators. The expedient that was urged on Philippe was to bring the matter before the States General. Saint-Simon records it as his belief that this was the recommendation of the Duc du Maine himself. Ere long we shall see the Duchess relying on the States General for the fulfilment of her own designs. The cause of the princes of the blood was complicated by that of the peers. The Duc du Maine was a formidable adversary for three reasons; his connection with the Parliament, his secret commerce with Spain, and above all his influence over the King. The inactivity of the Regent betrayed the oscillations of an irresolute mind whose first ideas were not always the least happy.

The close of the year 1716 saw bitterness reigning

<sup>1</sup> In drawing up their demand, the dukes and peers thus expressed themselves: "Monsieur le Duc du Maine will suffer no dishonour by being deprived of the rights attaching to the princes of the blood. His ambition, which led him to seek these distinctions from the late King, is no legitimate reason for his being allowed to retain them. But the princes of the blood would suffer dishonour if the legitimated princes were permitted to remain in fellowship with them" (Piossens, vol. i., p. 333).

between the princes of the blood and the King's natural sons. That the children of a double adultery should enjoy an equality of status with those of the Queen Consort, that no difference should be made between the offspring of a union hallowed by the sacrament of matrimony and the fruit of criminal concubinage, was an outrage alike against nature, religion and morality; such a scandal cried aloud for vengeance, and even stirred up the Duchess's own family. But the Princess, too haughty to avow herself beaten and withdraw her claims, plunged deeper still into her revolutionary projects.

In 1717 the tension was greater than ever. It was from the Duc de Bourbon's quarter that dangers began to menace the du Maines. "Monsieur le Duc," writes his aunt, "has begun his pranks again, that is to say, he is letting his tongue wag in a way that is more vexatious than awe-inspiring."<sup>1</sup> The Duc du Maine had already foreseen that he would lose his superintendent's post. On the 31st March he wrote to the Duc de Noailles, President of the Finance Committee, saying, "You are not unaware that if any evil chance compelled us to leave the Tuileries, my family and I should not have where to lay our heads." In point of fact the Duc de Bourbon, as Grand Master of the King's Household, had already protested against his uncle installing himself at the Tuileries without his permission.

In all their intrigues against the Duc du Maine, the princes of the blood and the dukes and peers, with Saint-Simon at their head, were pushing the Chief of the Government to extremes, and they demanded that the bastards should be reduced to the rank of their peerages. The du Maine faction had conceived the idea of a bed of justice which should depose the Regent and entrust the conduct of affairs provisionally to the

<sup>1</sup> The Duchesse du Maine to Madame de Maintenon. Paris, 6th May 1717.

Duc du Maine. This determined Philippe d'Orléans to give orders for the drawing-up of a decree of deprivation against the bastards.

The effect of the declaration of the Regency Council was to deprive the legitimated princes of the title, rights and privileges of princes of the blood, leaving them only their Parliamentary rank. With all the load of her eighty years upon her, Madame de Maintenon was visibly overwhelmed at the misfortunes that had befallen her Benjamin. She comforted him as best she could, whilst he, deserted by nearly everyone, lived the life of a solitary at Sceaux, saying that he could do nothing, and trembling for Louis XV. lest he should contract the small-pox, by which the Duc de Chartres had been attacked. The ex-governess was not yet inclined to despair of her pupil. "With all his good sense," she wrote to her niece Madame de Caylus, "the last thing one could say of him is that he is weak ;" and in another letter, "I found him in the same mind, persuaded that he must not acquiesce in his degradation, but bear what superior force compels him to bear till the time comes for him to regain his position. Monsieur le Duc du Maine appears well pleased with his brother and with the Duchesse d'Orléans, yet what can they do but give united expression to their regrets !"

It was a fact that Madame du Maine used to go and weep with her sister. The Regent, actuated as much by regard for her feelings as by motives of policy, apprised his wife of the Duc de Bourbon's dark designs against the legitimated princes, telling her that he himself would certainly not proceed to such lengths, and authorising her to reassure the Royal Bastards.

Madame de Maintenon, who was in a state of perpetual anxiety regarding the du Maines, had but one consolation, and that was that their children were out of reach of the storms which were threatening the fortunes of their house.

Mademoiselle du Maine was in the Convent of Maubuisson, while the Comte d'Eu was away with his tutor in the little château at Sceaux. In 1717, the eldest of the children, the Prince des Dombes, who was then scarcely seventeen, had gone off to Hungary to fight the Turks, whence he returned crowned with honours. One day the three children paid a visit to Madame de Maintenon, who was delighted with them. "Monsieur du Maine," she writes, "wanted me to see them. They called here yesterday on their way back from Rambouillet. They are everything that one could wish; they spoke just as they ought to at their age—there was not a word I should have added or left out, and their grandfather would have been highly pleased with them."

There we have a most interesting sidelight on these children, which is the more valuable as Madame du Maine affected to say very little about them. Henceforth she gave herself up heart and soul to politics. The legitimated princes protested against the Edict of the Council of the Regency, and Madame du Maine supported them with all the force at her command. The continued refusals of the Duc d'Orléans to receive his brother-in-law the Duc du Maine, and his obstinate silence regarding the causes of that prince's disgrace, confirmed the Duchess in her decision to foment a conspiracy which she had had for some time in mind, and which aimed at stirring up the whole Kingdom against the Regency. The romances with which she had crammed her brain, and which, according to Saint-Simon, had turned it, unduly influenced her actions in this new rôle, and the elaborate and fanciful nature of her plots, skilfully though she deemed them woven, were only too well calculated to put Dubois' spies on the alert. The two legitimated princes showed much greater calmness and a far more conciliatory temper. The Comte de Toulouse had no wife perpetually goading him into action, and the Duc du Maine, who

found a real help in his religion, bore himself with a calmness and resignation which put his enemies out of countenance. And to those who were on his side, or who interested themselves in his behalf, he recommended prudence and restraint in what they said. The Duc de Bourbon had declared before all the Council that his uncle was his enemy. He had spoken to Villars concerning the Duc du Maine's resolve to bring the King to Parliament, to have him declared of age, and thus do away with the Regency. "I do not consider the Duc du Maine has sufficient determination to take such a step," was the Maréchal's reply. D'Argenson thought otherwise. "So long as the Duc du Maine has a legal claim to the throne," he used to tell Philippe d'Orléans, "you will have a sword hanging over your head. His fall is become a necessity."

It must have been a rare sight to see the little Duchess hurrying off to the judges' quarters, laying siege to ministers, stirring up the zeal of advocates, and straining every nerve in the contest with an ardour equal to that displayed by her grandfather on the battle-field, and kindling in her friends the fire by which she herself was consumed. She wished, however, to make one more attempt to patch up a peace with the Regent, who, as the husband of a legitimated daughter of Louis XIV., was in rather an equivocal position, since his wife would naturally be expected to favour the du Maines. So to her sister-in-law the Duchesse du Maine betook herself. "Messieurs du Maine and de Toulouse are your brothers," she said to her point-blank, "and whoever harms them harms you, my sister; therefore I am come to claim your support." The Duchesse d'Orléans, who shared her brother's timidity and indecision, made no reply, and nothing came of it. Nevertheless, after the interview the Duchesse du Maine said in the hearing of everybody that she had only to call on the Regent in order to bring about a postponement of the whole matter.

But Monsieur le Duc and Saint-Simon would give no quarter; they were determined to fight to the end. The preliminary decree of 1717, which had been instigated by them, was the prologue to a drama which was to hurry the Duc and Duchesse du Maine and the still unwed Comte de Toulouse into the limbo of obscurity. Seeing them cast down from their seats, their enemies began to grow bold.

The system of Law was in full swing, but whilst the Duc de Bourbon and his cousin the Prince de Conti were scrambling for the gold of the Scottish financier, the Duc and Duchesse du Maine wisely held aloof from the scandalous speculations that the scheme brought in its train. In financial matters their conduct had ever been guided by the most scrupulous honesty. Monsieur du Maine displayed a special unselfishness. Unaffected by the motives which animated his wife, he was so far from desiring to retain a position which, though remunerative, did not really appeal to him, that he told Marshal de Villars he would readily give ten thousand écus to anyone who brought him a *lettre de cachet* ordering him not to quit his own estates for five years. At Sceaux, "in his little turret," he consoled himself as best he could, busying himself with the affairs of his own people, being most anxious to maintain or increase the family possessions. Saint-Simon is jocular at his expense, comparing him to Admiral Coligny, who a few days before his arrest was found by an envoy of the court pruning the trees in his garden at Châtillon-sur-Loing. "Though he had none of the Admiral's qualities," Saint-Simon continues, "the Duc du Maine, in order perhaps for people to see how calm he was, seized the 'precise moment' to purchase some houses in Paris at the bottom of the rue de Bourbon. He gave six hundred thousand livres for them, and built the Hôtel du Maine on their site. This he assigned to the

Duchesse du Maine, who hitherto had only regarded the Arsenal as a place for a casual supper-party. Affairs of deeper gravity were to occupy her in this new abode. It was to be for her a veritable cave of intrigue. Flattering herself with the hopes of a national upheaval that should most opportunely coincide with and assist her designs for avenging her private wrongs, she, the proud and witty princess, now curbs her passionate desire for gaiety and bends her mind to questions of politics. She imagines herself already rehabilitated, and the Duc d'Orléans, the author of all her humiliations, grovelling at her feet. In the fever of her ambition and her wrath, she remembered her motto from *Aminta*, and promised herself that the d'Orléans, the persecutors of her folk, should feel the sharp sting of the little but cruel bee, forgetting that the bee dies from its wounds or loses its life with its sting.



## CHAPTER VIII

Discord in France fomented by Alberoni—The Duchesse du Maine and her cabal—The Duc du Maine obliged to undertake the leadership against his will—Memorandum of the Duchess in favour of the legitimated princes—The Duc's memorandum—Lagrange-Chancel and the Philippics—The scholars and jurists of Sceaux—Madame du Maine and her adventurous campaign—The satellites of the Duchess—The Marquis de Pompadour—The Comte de Laval—The Duc de Richelieu—Voltaire and his tragedy of *Œdipus*—The defection of Villars—Duchess and the States-General—Lampoons against the Regent—Alberoni—The Prince de Cellamare—His secret correspondence with Spain—Interviews of the Duchesse du Maine with the Marquis de Pompadour—Plot-hatching at the Arsenal—Mademoiselle de Launay's assignations—The Duchess and the Provinces—Richelieu at Bayonne—The conspiracy begins to leak out—*Coup de main* against the Regent.

**A**LBERONI, the Spanish Prime Minister, had conceived the idea of setting Europe in a blaze, and he was on the point of succeeding. The rigid punctilios, the jealous rivalries of the haughty Spanish Court, skilfully played upon by the designing, afforded a *milieu* peculiarly favourable for the development of an intrigue in which the ambition of a volatile minister was to find a worthy ally in the anger of a disappointed woman.

The adherents of the Duchesse du Maine had acquiesced in her desire for revenge, and had promised, if necessity arose, to shed their life's blood for her, an undertaking which, in the event, found its fulfilment in a less heroic sacrifice—that of their ink. The Château de Sceaux resounded with bitter complaints, though, it is true, the Duchess set a momentary truce to her recriminations

to act as hostess to the Czar of Russia. That, however, was but an interlude, and was followed by a succession of the wildest projects. The Princes of the Blood used regularly to be consigned to the powers of darkness, and the little Court of the Fair Ludovise became a sort of political cave of intrigue. The Duchess had stirred up several of the Regent's gentlemen as well as some of the knights of Malta against the dukes and peers. She had even won over some Protestant lords to her cause. Her most effective allies she found in the representatives of the ex-Court of Louis XIV.; there were the Marshals of France such as Villeroy, a man of frivolous and arrogant disposition, who owed his position to favouritism rather than to merit, and played off the two parties one against the other, concealing his policy beneath the mask of the pleasure-lover; d'Huxelles, a soldier-diplomatist, very intimate with the Duc du Maine, by whom he had been introduced at Madame de Maintenon's; d'Harcourt, a creature of that Marquise; Tallard, his rival; Villars, a brilliant soldier, who walked warily between the rival factions, and the Marquis d'Effiat, "a man of great tact and ability," says Saint-Simon, "who had secretly sold himself to the Duc du Maine." Such were the principal survivors of a reign that had been so rich in illustrious men.

The Duc du Maine and the members of his faction gave the Duchesse d'Orléans to understand that, in the event of her husband's death, they would proclaim her Regent in his stead, and assist her with their counsels in such a manner as to give her a predominant voice in European affairs. They intended no violence to the Regent, but they broadly hinted that his irregular mode of life would make it impossible for him to live long. This sufficed to win her over to her brother's cause. The considerable anti-government party thus formed adopted as their titular chief the Duc du Maine, who

only accepted the position to please his wife. It was also owing to the Duchess's influence that her closest friend, Cardinal de Polignac, seeing a chance of playing a conspicuous part, cast in his lot with the conspirators. Several lords were only awaiting a propitious moment to declare themselves. The policy of the party was to act with every avoidance of publicity and in close concert with Cardinal Alberoni. Everything as yet had been kept a profound secret. The Duc d'Orléans had only suspicions to go upon; nevertheless he was obliged to make ready for war with Spain which might possibly become inevitable. The du Maines were already in correspondence with Madrid. Madame de Maintenon, who was more or less aware of what was going on, and who trembled at the consequences that she saw might be in store for her adopted children, continued to unburden her apprehensions to her niece, Madame de Caylus.

Monsieur le Duc du Maine is perpetually talking to me about the necessity of prudence for himself and his associates, but I do not think it possible to bring his wife to hold her tongue. Moreover, cannot the means always be found to unseal the lips even of the most reticent? I am afraid that my exhortations have been of no great use. Monsieur de Fréjus might do a great deal in the present juncture by advising Monsieur du Maine. I have always known quite well that our prince is not popular; does his brother find any friends on this occasion?

But the time had gone by for giving advice at Sceaux. War on the government had been declared; the scabbard had been flung away.

It was from Sceaux that Madame du Maine issued the famous memorial of the legitimated princes. She had entrusted its preparation to Cardinal de Polignac, who was assisted by Nicolas de Malézieu and de Dadvisart, Advocate-General of the Parliament of Toulouse. She herself personally contributed a passage

in which she went so far as to make an appeal to the nation and to put forth an urgent demand for the summoning of the States General. We find her employing, even at that date, the language of that advanced school of philosophers and politicians who, half a century later, were destined to usher in the revolution.

Citizens, Sovereign People, she wrote, shall it be brooked that a child prince, acting at the Regent's beck and call, shall rob the Duc du Maine of his contingent right to the throne in contempt of the long cherished wishes of the late King ? <sup>1</sup>

Her appeal was from the Regent to the only Sovereign Judge, the People ! And so we have this most unpromising and most haughty of princesses taking on the airs of the fieriest of revolutionaries.

With the object of devoting herself wholly to politics, she suspended the fêtes where she was worshipped like a Greek goddess, and set to work to delve among antique chronicles and mouldy records in search of precedents for the promotion of the bastard princes. Behold her, advocate-in-chief of their cause, and the Order of the Honey-Bee metamorphosed into a league of lawyers. At work o' nights, burning the midnight oil, with a colossal pile of learned tomes on her bed, she would laugh—so Madame de Staal tells us—and compare herself to Enceladus buried beneath Mount Etna. Adding page after page to her voluminous indictment of the Regent, she was writing, writing all day long. The most illustrious names of France find short shrift at her hands. In every case she discovers the family tree rooted in doubtful or plebeian soil. As for Saint-Simon, her deadly foe, what forsooth, were the founders of his family but a simple squire and a judge of Mayenne !

<sup>1</sup> "The Royal Authority is looked upon in these writings in the light of a mandate and a trust. The nation is recognised as being its own master, and the Monarchy is regarded merely as a civil contract. What a revolution in two years !" (Lemontey, "Histoire de la Régence.")

This noble Lord, so ran the memorial, comes of so upstart a stock, his patent is of such recent creation that the man in the street knows all about him. Scarcely more than a generation ago one of his cousins acted as squire to Madame de Schomberg. The resemblance between the arms of la Vaquerie which this family quarters with those of the Vermandois has prompted him to brag of his descent from a princess of that house. Finally, so ridiculously vain is this dukeling, that he connects with the noble house of *Bossu* a certain bourgeois judge of Mayenne called *le Bossu*, who married the heiress of the elder branch of his family.

What was the real origin of the d'Uzès, the first peers on the list? They sprang from one Gérard Bastet, who received his patent of nobility from the Bishop of Valence! The la Trémouilles could go no farther back than Charles V. The Béthunes were descended from a Scottish soldier of fortune; the Luynes from de Mornas, a petty advocate; the Richelieus from René Vignerot, a lute player to the Great Cardinal; the La Rochefoucaulds from George Vert, who plied the trade of a butcher in his native township; the Gramonts from Corisandre Dandouins, a mistress of Henri IV.; the Noailles from a servitor of the Comte de Beaufort; the d'Harcourts from the family of the Bishop of Bayeux. The origin of the d'Épernons was just as humble, and the Clermont-Tonnerres, for all their pride, only figured in the early records as Counsellors of the Dauphin of Vincennes!

And yet, concludes the pamphlet, these are the people who place themselves on a level with the Dukes of Burgundy, Guyenne and Normandy, who intrigue to reduce the legitimated princes of the blood to the level of their peerages!

Thrust by his wife into the thick of the fight, the Duc du Maine also put forth a pamphlet in which he made appeal to Natural Law, the law which God imposed upon Adam in the Garden of Eden (this he was pleased to make the limit of his researches), whereby he forbade him to have more wives than one. True it is that the sequel to this antediluvian argument might have been effectively turned against the Duc du Maine himself, for (skipping the deluge) it is related that Abraham, who was the

father of bastards, left all his possessions when he died to his lawful son Isaac, whereas on his natural children he merely bestowed presents.

Mademoiselle de Launay played the part of secretary to her mistress, helping her with her work, searching with her through law treatises and the dry-as-dust lucubrations of ancient and modern chroniclers. So inordinate were her compulsory vigils that she fell ill. A crowd of intriguers thronged to Sceaux on the pretext of lending their aid to the Duchess's cause, and to Rose de Launay fell the duty of introducing them. The satires, catches and pamphlets that emanated from the Court of Sceaux exerted an enormous influence on the public opinion of the day.

At the head of her attacking party, the Duchesse du Maine placed Lagrange-Chancel, an ex-musketeer and a former protégé of the Princesse de Conti. He had a caustic wit, and was described by a writer of the period as a combination of "poet and scorpion." He too had taken on a new rôle, and the despotic princess used her influence to convert the playwright into a bellicose pamphleteer.

Joseph de Chancel-Lagrange, generally called Lagrange-Chancel, the author of a certain number of tragedies which are now utterly forgotten, dissembled the ambitions of a courtier beneath the guise of a pamphleteer. Unsuccessful at the Palais Royal in obtaining the favours that had been granted to Destouches, Fontenelle, Lamotte-Houdart and Voltaire, this "witty little monstrosity," as Duclos calls him, had wormed himself into the Château de Sceaux, where he became one of the favourite guests of the Duchess.

He had become a more or less sincere supporter of the du Maine faction, in the first place because he had been spoiled, flattered and made much of at the Court of Sceaux, and secondly because he had been one of the

first to get wind of the contents of the King's will, and had deemed that the Duc du Maine, as one of the principal beneficiaries of the Royal generosity, would be in a position to favour his advancement. Doubtless, also, the Duchess's money gave an edge to his hatred of the Regent. Like Crébillon, of whom he was the prototype, his dramatic style was somewhat frigid and declamatory. All his fire was reserved for the satirical verses in which he attacked the Regent. He thundered with all his might against the licentiousness of the Palais Royal. "His calumnious rhymes," says Villemain, "had the brand of fire upon them." He lashed the Regent with strophes which, though not devoid of talent, were totally without restraint.

For him no charge was too terrible, no calumny too vile to be hurled against his victim. In the forefront of his horrible accusations he placed the poisoning of the Royal children and the crime of incest. Openly and mercilessly he blazoned his charges to the world, pointing to his patron the Duc du Maine as the only proper ruler of the State. The author alluded to the rumoured intentions of the Duc du Maine with regard to the French nobility. The Regent was likened to Nero or Sardanapalus, and the Duchesse de Berry to Messalina. In his fiery strophes Lagrange-Chancel invoked the wrath of the Avenging Furies of incest and divorce. Madame du Maine's adherents sent up a chorus of applause at all these finely phrased invectives. The Court of Sceaux and the Court of the Palais Royal were rivals alike in politics and in belles-lettres. The Comtesse de Murat, a friend of the Duchess, had just been sent into exile on account of a libellous pamphlet, a disquieting circumstance which did not hinder the Queen of Sceaux from becoming the *inspiratrice* of the *Philippics* of Lagrange-Chancel. These odes, published under the author's name, were spread abroad by tens of thousands.

Saint-Simon had the courage to take a copy to the Regent. Philippe read it over to himself, standing before the window of his little winter study. At first he remained impassive, then suddenly his countenance changed. "Ah, this is too much," he cried, "this is too horrible to bear." He signed a *lettre de cachet* on the spot, banishing the daring author to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite.

Stung to the quick by the accusations directed against her son, Madame la Palatine only displayed increased irritation against the Duc du Maine.<sup>1</sup>

It was in vain that the little King Louis XV. endeavoured to counteract the effect of Lagrange's attacks by lavishing marks of esteem and confidence on the Duc d'Orléans; the lampoons that were scattered broadcast about Paris and in the provinces stirred up men's feelings to boiling-point. Whilst the verses of Lagrange-Chancel would, it was supposed, have the effect of opening up the avenues of power to the Duc du Maine, the courtiers at Sceaux were endeavouring to assist him on a slow but certain progress towards the throne. From all points of the

<sup>1</sup> "Correspondance de Madame" (Joeglé's translation). See the despatches of the Venetian Ambassador Guglielmuimo, B.N., "fonds italien, 1932." One can obtain a pretty clear idea of Lagrange-Chancel's type of mind by reading the following letter which he subsequently wrote to the Regent, laying before him his most humble excuses: Madrid, 5th September 1722. "A. E.," vol. cccxx. (Spain). "The Royal protection with which His Christian Majesty has honoured me leads me to hope for the same gracious favour at the hands of His Royal Highness, and to trust that he will deign to forget the past in view of my repentance. Monsieur de Chavigny can inform your Excellency of the respectful manner in which I have always spoken of that great Prince, both at Genoa and at Madrid. . . . I should be under an excessive obligation to your Excellency if you would kindly add to the favours which I now beg of you, the kindness of saying a word to Monsieur le Blanc, so that he may have sent back to me the clothes which I left at the Iles Sainte-Marguerite to the value of 300 pistoles." What a glorious specimen of morality! This certainly is the sorriest possible pamphleteer of the eighteenth century (Ed. de Barthélemy, "Filles du Régent," preface. "Papiers de la Marquise de Balleroy.")





LOUIS PHILIPPE JOSEPH, DUC D'ORLEANS

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compass came pundits of the law to offer their services to the Duchess, certain of a favourable reception. This traffic of erudition brought Mademoiselle de Launay into contact with all sorts of people, "savantasses," as she terms them with malicious wit. Madame du Maine could not resign herself to inaction. The debasement of her family was for her the fall of an edifice which it had been the task of her life to rear. It struck consternation to her breast. After the manner of sick people who rush away to quacks, she took advice from anybody and nobody. In her feverish anxiety to peer into the future she even stooped to consult fortune-tellers and necromancers.

The popular mind was at this time passing through a superstitious phase, which is the more curious when we consider the number of eminent and enlightened minds the period produced. Charlatans and alchemists derived their clientèle from every rank of society, the aristocracy not excepted.

The Duchesse du Maine considered herself entitled to count on the Parliament of Paris, and on the provincial Parliaments who followed the metropolitan example. She also relied for support on the leaders of the Constitutional Party and its fanatical zealots, on the province of Brittany, which might be joined by Guyenne and Languedoc, and last, but not least, on the ex-court of Louis XIV.

Aware of the disfavour into which the *noblesse* had fallen since their quarrel with the peers, she endeavoured to profit by the situation to win them over to Spain by holding out every inducement she could think of. She displayed opposition to the treaties to which Philip V., despite the efforts of Dubois and de Torcy, steadily refused to assent. The conquest of Sardinia and Sicily by the Spaniards seemed to favour her enterprise, and the habitués of the Court of Sceaux were encouraging the factious princess in her adventurous undertaking. They

were, indeed, to be her chief agents. At their head were the Marquis de Pompadour, the Comte de Laval, Cardinal de Polignac and the young Duc de Richelieu.

Pompadour, a courtier, had been brought into the plot by the wrath which he had felt at the Regent's hostility to Philip V., for Philip V. was the son of the best friend he had ever had, "le Grand Dauphin." He announced himself as the friend of the English Pretender, James Stuart, and was looking forward to the time when he would take up arms against King George. Guy Henri de Laval, generally known as la Mentonnière, a cadet of the house of Montmorency, was well fitted by his energy, daring and resourcefulness to play the part of a conspirator. The Duc d'Orléans was his sworn enemy, and since the quarrel between the Princes, he had been heart and soul with the Duchesse du Maine. Determined at all costs to increase his own importance, he had prevailed on the Regent to grant him permission to float a royal standard on the ground that the Lavals numbered among their ancestors a Duchesse d'Anjou, who had been Queen of Naples and Sicily. He had even announced his intention of establishing a right of precedence for his house over the Chancellor of France. Growing weary after a time of all these paltry questions of etiquette, he had taken the most active part in the movement of the provincial nobility, and added fuel to their zeal for the legitimated princes; from that time onwards he had been entirely at the service of the Duchesse du Maine.

He plunged whole-heartedly into the business of the rebellion. His atrabilious temperament, his lack of occupation, his family pride, his monetary difficulties, a certain intellectual warp and lack of concentration, a forbidding scar that disfigured his countenance, all helped to make an ideal malcontent of him. In the preliminary stages neither the affairs of Spain nor the formation of a revolutionary party entered into the question.

The sole aim was to impress on the *noblesse* that the claims of the legitimated princes in no way threatened their prerogatives. Laval indeed obtained the signature of a number of gentlemen to the petition drawn up by the nobility against the Dukes, and to their protest in the matter of the bastard princes. The Regent refused to hear the one and cut short the other.

The efforts that Cardinal de Polignac had made as Ambassador at Warsaw in 1696 and 1697, in support of the candidature of the Prince de Conti for the throne of Poland, had not been crowned with success. This reverse had had the double effect of sending him into seclusion and of increasing his wariness. A diplomatic cautiousness represented his contribution to the conspirators' armoury. He composed pamphlets and invented secret codes, but he took no active part in the plot himself, and discouraged activity in others. Despite his ambition, all his proceedings were regulated by the constitutional softness and timidity of his nature.

In the Duc de Richelieu the Duchess thought she had found a second Comte de Fiesque, a man who would be at once a weaver of plots and a lover of pleasure. Acting under feminine impulsion, Richelieu had become a party to the conspiracy out of pique at not having been allotted a prominent position in the government. He had kindled the flame of passion in the heart of Mademoiselle de Valois, a daughter of the Regent, and so hotly did he press his suit, that he scaled the walls of the Palais Royal to keep nocturnal assignations with her; all of which gave immeasurable pain to a rival innamorata—she too a princess—Mademoiselle de Charolais, the sister of Monsieur le Duc. The Regent was furious at this daring onslaught, and the public thought it a magnificent joke—the laughter spread to Madrid. At Sceaux the ballad of "The Unprotected Maiden" was on everybody's lips. The Duchesse d'Orléans took the opportunity of giving her

husband a piece of her mind, and his mother laid on in right German fashion. Mademoiselle de Valois, who had tearfully protested her innocence, appeared to be falling into a decline. The Duc d'Orléans found the domestic hearth intolerable. He nicknamed his wife Madame Lucifer. Richelieu he threatened with the Bastille, and Richelieu wiped off the score by spoiling two chances of marriage for the damsel, one with the Prince des Dombes and the other with the Comte de Charolais. But that did not satisfy his vengeance. Young and daring, he was the man of the hour at Paris; no female heart could withstand him. Here was a conspirator ripe for plucking. Madame du Maine deemed that the hour had come to gather him in, and at her request Cardinal Alberoni addressed him the most flattering of letters. As Richelieu himself tells us in his graphic "Memoirs," which are often too diverting to be true, even if all his fine stories are not apocryphal, he was offered all those honours and rewards which are usually so liberally dispensed by ambassadors with castles in Spain. The young duke was carried away by the vanity he felt at the flattering attentions bestowed on him by a statesman who appeared to have taken Cardinal Richelieu for his model. Embittered by his first disappointment, desperately anxious to see his family once again in possession of the hereditary command of the galleys, he was only waiting for a change in the government, and he thought that by becoming an accomplice in the intrigues of Sceaux and the designs of the Spanish court, he might discover the means of satisfying his ambitions and avenging his rebuffs.

The tempting offers of Alberoni were seconded by the cunning insinuations of the Spanish Ambassador. Richelieu was asked to lend his name and his hopes for the future to a cause which had for its representatives the bravest and the worthiest of the downtrodden *noblesse* of France. Their aim was to uphold the lawful claims

of Philip V. and give effect to the violated will of the late Sovereign ; to rescue the little King from a guardianship that boded him no good, and to avenge the dishonourable tyranny which held their country in thrall. In a trice Richelieu was in the net ! He held the colonelcy of a regiment in garrison at Bayonne which was to be one of the first to enter Spain, in the event of war, under the general command of Marshal Berwick. With a light heart he opened communications with the more or less overt enemies of his country. He thought to play Cinq Mars with impunity under a prince who fell far short of Cardinal de Richelieu. Without the slightest hesitation he promised to hand over Bayonne to the Spaniards, and to assist in raising certain of the southern provinces.

In another sphere Madame du Maine could still count on young Voltaire, for although to the Regent's face he was " Your Royal Highness's most humble servant," he tore His Royal Highness's reputation to pieces behind his back when the Princess was by to hear. Many were the satires which flowed from his pen to the glorification of Louis the Great. Voltaire was accused of being the author of one which concluded with the famous line :

J'ai vu ces maux et je n'ai pas vingt ans.<sup>1</sup>

He was imprisoned in the Bastille, where he remained till the 11th April 1718. Banished thereafter to Châtenay, his birth-place, he found himself in the neighbourhood of Sceaux, whither, as we have already seen, he managed to get himself invited. His *Œdipus*, a tragedy written in prison, was performed the same year on the Duchess's stage. The work was regarded as being a personal attack on the Regent, the story of the incestuous love of the Theban King being interpreted as a satire on the criminal relations of which Philippe d'Orléans was alleged

<sup>1</sup> He was twenty-four in 1718.

to be guilty. The production, betraying as it did a great love of letters and deep-rooted political animosity, smacked decidedly of the Court of Sceaux.

After those few noblemen of mark and a certain number of Breton gentlemen, the intriguers simply consisted of the Duchesse du Maine's cronies and retainers whose allegiance was the offspring of benefits received. "They drew up," says Madame de Staal, "several memorials as false in point of fact as they were defective in reasoning, in which the merest notions were advanced as certainties, and in which they guaranteed the co-operation and support of several persons who were in complete ignorance of their designs, but whom on the idlest conjectures they considered as likely confederates.

"Subdivision," says Cardinal de Retz, "brings nearly every party to the ground," and as a set-off against these offers of service, which were probably insincere, and certainly ineffective, the Duchesse du Maine experienced the mortification of beholding the defection of some of her adherents. The Villars were tools of the du Maines, and had practically passed their lives at Sceaux. But now they began covertly to coquet with the Duc de Bourbon, supporting the cause of the Condés and at the same time pretending to champion that of their adversaries. This duplicity did not save them from the disgrace which overtook them as the too well-merited retribution for the rapacity and cunning of the old victor of Denain. The Duchesse du Maine made a few attempts to enlist him, but obtained nothing but a few empty protestations of regard. With the other Marshals, nearly all old men, full of honours and laden with wealth, who had not learned the art of conspiracy under Louis XIV., her efforts were just as unsuccessful.

Enraged by Dubois' negotiations with Holland and England, the pet Orleans policy, she found herself in a



position to wave before the eyes of her adherents an unexpected weapon. This was nothing less than an autograph letter addressed by Philip V. to the King of France on the 16th March 1718, protesting against the terms of the treaty. "I shall never," so the letter ran, "put my signature to such conditions; to me they are intolerable. I will not enter into the fatal consequences of this alliance; I limit myself to beseeching your Majesty to convene the States General of your Kingdom without delay to deliberate on a matter of such great importance." The idea of summoning the States General had already occurred to the Duchess, and she was quick to seize on it now. She pointed out to her followers that this meeting of the National Assembly was one of the cardinal points in their programme; on it depended all her hopes—it was her last and her principal card. From this moment she made it her ceaseless aim, believing that it would inevitably conduce to the success of her own cause.

But further than that she endeavoured to gain her ends by the dissemination of slander. When people's passions are inflamed to such a degree as hers were, they are not particular as to what means they employ; to them no means come amiss. The scrupulousness with which Marshal de Villeroi affected to examine the food and drink that were intended for the little King's table, gave renewed currency to the old rumours, one of which now took the form of a charge of attempting to poison the Duchesse d'Orléans. The brothers and relatives of the Regent's wife circulated the report that a poisonous powder had been administered to her, the fatal effects of which had only been averted by means of an antidote. Owing to her notorious dislike of her daughter-in-law, Madame la Palatine became the target of these suspicions, but although naturally spiteful and vindictive, she was far too upright a woman to be

associated with such a crime. Justly incensed at so base an insinuation, she hurried off to the Duchesse du Maine, from whom she did not conceal her indignation. "My niece," said she, "I beg you to inform me who told you that Madame d'Orléans had been obliged to take an antidote against poison." Madame du Maine, blushing furiously and breaking into a laugh, returned an evasive reply. "It is well, my niece," was Madame's rejoinder, "it would have been too wicked of you had you said such a thing." To these words the Duchess could find no answer, and quitted the room. This was tantamount to avowing her responsibility for the infamous statement.

For some time past Madame du Maine had considered that everything became her. She could not forgive the Regent for doing violence to his natural kindness of heart in order to carry out the revengeful dictates of Monsieur le Duc and Saint-Simon. Her mode of attack was conspicuously feminine. It consisted of slanders, lampoons, catches, and venomous gossipings disseminated broadcast for the credulous public to browse upon.<sup>1</sup> Mademoiselle de Launay was dispatched to interview the Comte de Laval, who regaled her with a host of chimerical ideas. Then she was sent off to Sceaux to look through the papers there and to commit the more compromising to the flames.

The letters which had for some years been secretly passing between Sceaux and the Spanish Court now became more frequent and more decided in tone. It was on the 25th May that the Spanish Ambassador at Paris had forwarded to Alberoni the first two papers concerning the cabal, informing him in cipher that

<sup>1</sup> "As for the chansonnettes of Sceaux, I vow I used to think them poor enough." (Mme. de Staal's "Mémoires.") Madame la Palatine wrote: "The moment anyone speaks ill of my son or appears dissatisfied, Madame du Maine has him summoned to Sceaux, pets him and pities him the better to hear him hold forth against my son. I am disgusted at his patience" ("Correspondance de Madame").

they were the work of the Duchesse du Maine and the Marquis de Pompadour, and that they had been drawn up after a consultation at the Arsenal. This is perhaps the solitary instance in the whole of the correspondence in which the writers of the letters are referred to by name. Elsewhere their authorship is but vaguely hinted at. In her wheedling way, Madame du Maine continued to foster the designs which, notwithstanding the formal provisions of the Treaty of Utrecht, Alberoni still entertained regarding the rights of Philip V. to the crown of Louis XIV. Alberoni was a gardener's son, who by a marvellous turn of fortune had risen to be Prime Minister of Spain: To the ambition of a Richelieu he united the cunning of a Mazarin, but being in reality more of an intriguer than a statesman, he lent a ready ear to the overtures of the Queen of Sceaux. On the 6th June he sent a reply to his Ambassador instructing him to follow up the plot in the name of Philip V. and Queen Elizabeth Farnese, and unstintingly to lavish praises and promises on the Duchesse du Maine.

The Ambassador of Spain, Antonio Giudice Duc de Guiovenazzo, Prince de Cellamare, a nephew of Cardinal del Giudice, was at this time sixty-one years of age. In 1702 he had accompanied Philip V. to Naples. Taken prisoner by the Imperial Forces at the siege of Gaeta in 1707, he regained his liberty on the conclusion of the Peace of Utrecht. In 1715 he came from Madrid to Paris with the title of Envoy-Extraordinary of Philip V. He had received instructions to do everything in his power to oust the Duc d'Orléans from the Regency with the view of its being entrusted to his own Sovereign. Becoming thus the most active agent of Cardinal Alberoni,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Despite his excesses and his reckless audacity, Alberoni might perhaps have achieved the fame of a Ximenes if only he had succeeded in the end. He vindicates everything he did, but in his actions he trusted rather to chance than to a reasoned plan of campaign. Time was when

his sole aim was to snatch for Spain whatever advantage he could from the disaffection and intrigue that were rife at the French Court. Subtle and insinuating in his address, slow and deliberate in speech and action, he relied for the fulfilment of his policy on the general detestation of the English name, on the hostility existing between the aristocratic party and the Parliament, and, lastly, on the co-operation of the legitimated princes.

Cellamare began to circulate pamphlets attacking the Regent, and to Madrid he sent word as follows: "I am continuing to cultivate our vine, but I do not want to put forth my hand to pluck the fruit until it is ripe." Events moved but slowly, and the Duchesse du Maine, growing sick of roundabout expedients, thought it would be well to get into more direct communication with the Spanish Ambassador. A word, a hint, of her design she let fall in the hearing of the Comte de Laval. That was the spark which set the plot ablaze. Laval and Pompadour conveyed the suggestion to the Ambassador, and the suggestion proved acceptable.

It was pretty widely known that Cellamare was secretly in touch with all the malcontents in the Kingdom, and that far from limiting himself to harmless protestations, he was preparing to send them all in full battle array against the Duc d'Orléans. The Court of Sceaux was bound to benefit by such a state of affairs. Pompadour was out of favour with the Regent, and for the last two years he had been living a life of melancholy and penurious retirement with his wife, a daughter of Marshal de Navailles. He eagerly seized on the opportunity of emerging from his obscurity, and gave a ready assent to Laval's proposal to introduce him to the Duchess.

Alberoni had almost restored to Spain the brilliance and prosperity of the reign of Philip II. Unhappily for his country, if Alberoni was inferior to Ximenes, Philip V. was still more inferior to Philip II.

Pompadour was already on visiting terms with Cellamare owing to his connection with the Prince de Chalais.

At the very first audience, Madame du Maine confided in him all the mortification she felt at the treatment meted out to her husband. "My grief," she added, "would become irremediable if we should be so unfortunate as to lose the King, whose life seems to be hanging by a thread. What think you of the King of Spain?"

"I freely avow," Pompadour afterwards said to Le Blanc, in a letter which was as it were his confession, "that I told the Duchess I could not help feeling some affection for the son of my old master." As the conversation went on they passed from the King to the Ambassador, and Madame du Maine concluded by asking her interlocutor gently to upbraid the Prince de Cellamare for his extreme reserve towards her. Pompadour carried out the behest, but the Ambassador replied that he was afraid that in a good many houses people were not too pleased to see him, and that his visits were looked on as suspect; the result being that he went out very little. All the same, the Duchess's first step in his direction was not barren of result.

In May 1718 two of the principal exiles from the Court of Versailles were brought to the Duchess and persuaded her that with her co-operation it might be possible to essay some important measures. "Your Highness should see the Spanish Ambassador," they kept murmuring in her ear. The confederates used to meet sometimes at Sceaux and sometimes in Paris, in a little pavilion at the bottom of the Arsenal garden by the banks of the Seine, a lonely spot highly suitable for the hatching of plots.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to the kindness of Monsieur Funck-Brentano for the opportunity of seeing an engraving of the place, which is preserved at the Arsenal. The Duchesse du Maine, whose husband was Grand Master of the Artillery establishment, had a whole block built for her

As yet neither the Duchess nor the Comte de Laval knew the Spanish Ambassador except by sight. Madame du Maine's difficulty was to discover a means of opening negotiations with him direct without compromising him in the eyes of the Regent. "That's easily managed," said Laval, "you can meet by night at the Arsenal." The daring princess accepted the proposal and went to the rendezvous accompanied by Mademoiselle de Launay. She drove thither in the Marquis de Pompadour's carriage with the devoted Laval on the box in coachman's livery. Later on in the evening he drove up Cellamare in the same carriage. Two secret meetings took place in this manner, both presided over by the Duchesse du Maine. On each occasion Cellamare dilated upon his master's dislike of the proposed treaty, and went so far as to say that Philip V. had made up his mind not to sign it. The Duchess was highly delighted at this piece of intelligence, and made so bold as to produce from her pocket a "document" of her own composition, setting forth the reasons, as she conceived them, which should determine the King of Spain to unite with France and the King of Sicily against the Emperor and England rather than to acquiesce in the conditions contained in the suggested Quadruple Alliance.

Such were the circumstances in which Spain's representative made his entrée into this French intrigue. There was nothing so very grave about the matter, and Alberoni was well pleased that the Duchess should take her husband's place in playing the secret part of *Deus ex machina* in the affairs of Spain. In a letter dated the 6th June he ordered Cellamare to pursue the matter, to load the Duchess with encomiums and promises in the

there which is at present occupied by the Library. There still remain in the two salons some admirable examples of Louis XV. woodwork. ("Histoire de la bibliothèque de l' Arsenal," vol. vi., p. 387 of the Catalogue of MSS. in the Library, and vol. viii.)

name of Philip V., and to circulate certain papers favourable to the latter's court, particularly the reply to Fitz Morris' letters, a reply which had been practically dictated to the Abbé Brigault by Madame du Maine.

The Duchess did not restrict herself to these committee meetings at the Arsenal. Mademoiselle de Launay was entrusted by her with the duty of holding an assignation at midnight beneath an arch of the Pont-Royal. She managed everything herself, and, just as when her lawsuit was in progress, a host of adventurers, knaves and intriguers thronged to see her. She had innumerable correspondents and all sorts of more or less dubious confederates. Two of them at least were spies of Dubois, who was contenting himself for the present with keeping an eye on the march of events. The Comte de Laval was told off to stir up the *noblesse* of Poitou and Anjou, but the sole result of his efforts was to persuade a few "gentilshommes" of these provinces to protest against the degradation of the legitimated princes. Madame du Maine dispatched emissaries to raise a regiment in Switzerland in the name and at the expense of the King of Spain. Pompadour she hurried away to Normandy. Another envoy she commissioned to receive the loyal pledges of a number of Breton gentlemen at Nantes. His secret despatches told a wonderful tale. "If," he reported, "a Spanish squadron merely shows itself off the coast here, the whole province will be up." Bayonne was the gate of France from the Spanish side, and Richelieu's regiment was garrisoned there. The young colonel hoped to persuade his men to remain inactive, and with their connivance to allow the army of Philip V. to enter French territory at that spot. Richelieu therefore asked Marshal Berwick not to transfer the regiment from Bayonne.

On the whole matters were going but indifferently well with Cellamare. The satisfactory tone of the early

reports had given Alberoni great pleasure. Never questioning for a moment the correctness of his information, he began to grow impatient at what he considered the Ambassador's procrastination. Cellamare was between the devil and the deep sea. On the one hand he kept receiving violent injunctions which he had no means of carrying out, on the other he was confronted with the discouraging knowledge that several of the confederates were already but too anxious to relinquish their share in the plot. Obligated to prevaricate to everybody, he continued to write his figurative epistles to Madrid.

I am acting so that our workmen shall not abandon the task, but I do not expect that they should expose themselves to the heat of the sun ; I wish them to wait for the favourable season, and in the meantime to find a shelter without being too nice as to the quality of the lodging. The foreman in charge is beginning to say that he has spent a great deal, and that his purse is empty. I believe it is a fact that he is in need of money, and that his parents, though rich, afford him no assistance. However, I have given him no definite answer. I hope when the time comes that the Queen will be well served. I speak our men fair and endeavour to keep them steadfast.

This brings us to the end of the summer of 1718. Time is moving onward, but " up to now there has been plenty of writing and precious little acting." <sup>1</sup> Fair words had been received from many exalted personages, but of men of action not one was available, or at any rate only the very youthful Duc de Richelieu. On what, then, could the conspirators rely for success? What prince of the blood could they set up against the Duc d'Orléans? The Comte de Toulouse was wanting in zeal; the Duc du Maine in enterprise. He had never had a finger in his wife's intrigues, as she herself subsequently affirmed in the most formal manner. In spite of Saint-Simon's perfervid accusations, it is an

<sup>1</sup> Baudrillart, vol. v., pp. 330, 345.



established fact that all he did was to criticise the Quadruple Alliance, and that he had a perfect right to do.

After a while Cellamare's lack of reticence regarding his relations with his French supporters confirmed the suspicions which the *Philippics*, rumours from abroad, the Dutch gazettes, Stanhope's correspondence, and, above all, the reports of their spies, had combined to awaken in the minds of the Regent and Dubois. Their police were on the alert.

The Regent's habit of rambling about at night unattended save by two or three domestics and a few friends whose wits, like his own, were dulled with heavy drinking, afforded many opportunities of taking him unawares. Laval was full of plans for bringing off some such coup, but the Duchess, fearful of extreme measures, considered them either too violent or too perilous. On one occasion, however, and that in broad daylight, their tactics came within an ace of success. Cellamare pointed out to the chief of a band of hired men the place where the Regent was in the habit of walking with the Duchesse de Berry. Some fellows were concealed in the Bois de Boulogne, having been furnished with a description of the personage whom they were to kidnap without being told exactly who it was. The chief of the band, seeing Philippe coming along, made a sign to his men; but they mistook the signal and rushed on an individual who was sauntering a few paces ahead, and seized him by the collar. They had to release him with profuse apologies for their mistake. Meanwhile the Regent had seized the opportunity to make off with his daughter. This unlucky encounter made a deal of noise and engaged the attention of the Regency Council. Like a wise man, the chief of the band of kidnappers made a bee-line for the Low Countries. Despite his mother's warnings, the Regent persisted in going to Saint Cloud every night to have

supper in company with his roués at Madame de Parabère's. With ironic indulgence, he pardoned the individual who had nearly succeeded in carrying him off, had him brought back to France, and even rewarded him for his daring.

On her side Madame du Maine was full of energy. No detail was beneath her notice. The conspirators again fell to hatching manifestos. The Duchess even went the length of making Malézieu and de Polignac prepare some letters so that they should be all ready for signature by Philip V. They were intended to facilitate his task, which was to demand from the King and Parliament the fulfilment of her claims.

## CHAPTER IX

Death of the Duchesse de Vendôme (11th April 1718)—The Treaty of the Quadruple Alliance (17th July 1718)—Further memorandum of Madame du Maine—First period of the conspiracy—Cellamare has recourse to Madame du Maine—The Duc du Maine seeks support from the malcontents—The subordinate agents of the Duchess—Madame Dupuy—The Comtesse de Chauvigny—Mademoiselle de Launay—The Abbé Brigault (August 1718)—His rôle in the plot—MM. de Pompadour and de Laval, the two ministers of the Duchess—Managing committee of the conspiracy—Lack of means to carry it out—The plan—The Bed of Justice of the 26th August—Edict reducing the rank of the bastard princes—The Duchesse du Maine at the Arsenal and the Tuileries—Scenes between her, the Comte de Toulouse, President de Mesmes, and the Duc du Maine—Observations of Madame la Palatine concerning the Duchess.

**O**N the 11th April 1718 occurred the death of the Duchesse de Vendôme, who had been unhappily married, and had long since been living apart from her husband. To her sister the Duchesse du Maine she bequeathed a considerable amount of property, which, added to the immense fortune already possessed by the du Maines, permitted the Duchess, at all events for a time, to meet the expenditure involved in her far-reaching and secret machinations.

On the 17th July of the same year the terms of the Quadruple Alliance were submitted by the Duc d'Orléans to the Council of the Regency. Being specially directed against Spain, the proposal was vehemently opposed by the Duc du Maine in a speech of considerable length, but despite his antagonism, the treaty was signed. Alberoni

did not conceal his wrath at the measure. From that date the plot began to take definite shape. Its development was favoured by the chaotic condition of the national finances, which Law's system was powerless to remedy. Parliament drew up remonstrances; the Regent replied by sending d'Aguesseau into exile. The enemies of the government closed their ranks and prepared for battle. The various cabals amalgamated, and each confederate was allotted his appointed task. From Sceaux a fresh indictment was fired off against the government. In it the Duchess insisted on the necessity of deterring the King of Spain from agreeing to the Quadruple Alliance. This new pamphlet was scattered far and wide, and six of its signatories found themselves in the Bastille. The Parliament dared not breathe a word of protest. Dubois harked back on writings of a certain Spaniard who had taken up the defence of the bastard princes. Little by little the Regent drew off from Philip V., and finally denounced the alliance. Cardinal Alberoni continued his manœuvres against Philippe d'Orléans. Surrounded by malcontents and persons hostile to that prince, the Spanish Ambassador fell into an error that is common among party men. He mistook the views of the particular coterie among whom he happened to be placed for the sentiments of the nation at large. It was thus that he came to send word to Alberoni that the nobility, the Parliament, the people and the army—the whole of France in fact—detested the Regent, and that Philip V. was king in every heart. He was confident that a conflagration might be kindled in France if the firebrands were forthcoming, confessing at the same time that the firebrands were lacking. To the Spanish Minister he made no secret of the dangers of the undertaking, but Alberoni was loth to abandon it. If firebrands were wanting, he would avail himself of lesser lights. In order to



E E E C C      E C C C C C      C C  
 E C C C C      E C C C C C C C      C C  
 C C C C      C C E E C C C C C C  
 E C



further his tortuous designs, he was not above seeking aid from courtiers in disgrace, female cranks or female malcontents. Whom among these could he have found better suited to his purpose than the Duchesse du Maine, "that she-devil," as she has been called, "with her paint and powder, her patches and her hoops." If she too often compromised her cause by childish behaviour, she oftener still sowed fire and fury in her train. She attempted, moreover, with aggravating inconsistency to carry out a variety of ill-assorted plans, thinking apparently that a combination of little measures would operate as effectively as one decisive course of action. As for the Duc du Maine, whom she was too prone to regard as a supernumerary, he was hard at work swelling the ranks of his party with the disaffected spirits. They were to be found everywhere in France—in court, town and country. The principal centre of their activities was the Château of Sceaux. It was, as it were, the receiving chamber of the complaints of people of every rank of society. Aggrandised by Louis XIV., the bourgeoisie were jealous of the nobles. The nobles, divided against themselves, were carrying on a struggle with the Parliament and reproaching the Regent with failing to support them. Parliament complained that it was not consulted. The people were groaning at the way the public funds were squandered on court favourites. Furthermore, Satire, which had been revived by Lagrange-Chancel, was deriving fresh vigour from the pen of the youthful Arouet. These warring parties, these literary alarums admirably served the purpose of the conspirators. The lash of Juvenal brought comfort to their souls. Did the Duchesse du Maine, wide-awake though she was, quite appreciate the dangers that her strange campaign held in store for her? If she did, she sought at all events to blind herself to the consequences of her acts. When she perceived her husband in the grip of fear, she would

endeavour to dazzle him into confidence by drawing on the riches of her imagination, and when her confidante, more level-headed than she, said, "Your Highness will find yourself in prison," she laughed in her face.

The papers relating to the Cellamare conspiracy throw rather a curious light on the ignoble intrigues to which the princess descended with certain subordinate agents, first among whom may be mentioned the Abbé Le Camus, an unfrocked Capuchin. "Nowadays," wrote Tallemant des Réaux, "every insignificant little cleric struts about calling himself 'the Abbé So-and-So.'"

It was Le Camus who sent to Mademoiselle de Launay the notorious Madame Dupuy to whom we have already referred. She was a fortune-teller, who, though a widow, gave herself out as the wife of an Antwerp bookseller. Rose de Launay was also brought into relationship with a Madame de Chauvigny, a sham Countess who was in reality a spy of the Regent's, and playing a double game. She it was who undertook to introduce the Abbé Le Camus at the Duchesse du Maine's. Acting on secret orders from Philippe d'Orléans, communicated to her by Dubois, this woman herself brought to the princess on some pretext or another a letter from Le Camus, soliciting an audience. Madame du Maine, not a little carelessly, swallowed the bait, and the very next day sent her footman Despavots to Madame de Chauvigny to ask her for the man in question.

Madame de Chauvigny took a carriage, went to fetch Le Camus at the Hôtel d'Allemagne in the Rue de Vaugirard, and drove him to the Louvre. They were both conducted to the Duchess's room, where she explained to them her ideas on the subject of the legitimated princes. She engaged the Abbé for the purpose of drawing up her memorials against the princes of the blood. Madame du Maine particularly impressed upon him that he was to exhibit great moderation in what he wrote concerning



the Regent and the legitimated princes, it being her object, she pretended, to bring people over by the gentleness of her appeal. This first conference was followed by another in the presence of Malézieu, the Chevalier de Gavaudun and Mademoiselle de Launay. Madame de Chauvigny continued to remain in touch with the Duchess and Le Camus, of whose writings she used to make fair copies, never neglecting to give an account of them to His Royal Highness.

Le Camus proposed to the Duchess that a further agent should be let into the secret. This was the Abbé de Vayrac, another little quill-driver who was willing to ply his pen against the Regent. Madame Dupuy, who was asked to sound him, promised him "great rewards" from the Duchess if he would become the tool of her resentment. Mademoiselle de Launay took part in more and more conferences at the house of Madame de Chauvigny. Vayrac got Madame Dupuy to offer the Duchess a pamphlet of his, in which he maintained that the States General were alone competent to settle the matter of the legitimated princes, but she never obtained it from him. Later on, in order to make good her defence, she was obliged to demand to be confronted with the actors in these paltry machinations. She then claimed, with questionable sincerity, that the captious Vayrac and the beguiling Madame Dupuy had both been shown the door, though in spite of that they managed to force their way in occasionally. In fact these two backstair politicians gave Madame du Maine the most sensational news regarding the coming arrest of herself and her husband. But this was to anticipate matters. The Duchess reported the rumours to her mother, and caused her brother to transmit them to Madame d'Orléans. Both princesses were just as uneasy as Madame de Maintenon with regard to the future of the du Maines, but neither of them dared to say a word.

It will be seen that in this comedy the actors were no less disreputable than the piece. Disdaining no material that came to her hand, Mademoiselle de Launay even went the length of pressing her mistress's two lackeys, Davranches and Despavots, into the service. She disguised them as Flemish noblemen, and sent them about under the high-sounding titles of the Prince de Listenay and the Chevalier de la Roche. She employed them as emissaries to carry messages to and from the agents of the Duchess. But Vayrac informed the Regent of the attempts that were being made to corrupt him, and Philippe had a trap laid for the two worthies. Davranches was seized and put in prison; Despavots managed to escape to Flanders.

Madame du Maine had taken part in theatricals with her lackeys before now. At present she was employing them for the salvation of France. How these stories of the high politics of footmen and ladies' maids—with Dubois' commentaries thereon—must have tickled the Regent! As he loved an adventure and was not above putting on a disguise, he amused himself, so the story runs, by going in person to one of Mademoiselle de Launay's secret conclaves dressed as a copyist. Madame du Maine's ignoble intrigues had no other effect than that of illustrating, when the day arrived to bring to light the letters of her various underlings, the reckless inconsequence of her own behaviour. On the other hand, she cannot be taxed with having sullied her reputation by mixing herself up with financiers of dubious repute, as Madame de Tencin did in her day. She gave away her money in handfuls, and never had anything to do with speculation, a circumstance of no little rarity in those days.

She doubtless regarded the abbés of the day as cut out for diplomacy rather than the Church, and she recruited her secret agents from among them without

staying to make sure of the exact degree of confidence they deserved. In addition to the shining lights Le Camus and de Vayrac, respectively a pauper and a sycophant whose services went to the highest bidder, she took a third ecclesiastic into her employ. This was the Abbé Brigault, of the diocese of Lyons. He was a confidential agent of the Marquis de Pompadour, who put him into communication with Cellamare through the instrumentality of Monsieur de Magny.

This second-rate scribbler was the author of a pamphlet attacking the Regent, entitled "A reply to the letters of Fitz Morris." Fitz Morris was an Irish gentleman who had written a defence of Philippe d'Orléans, in which he asserted that Louis XIV. just before his death had let slip the following words: "Had I sent my nephew the Duc d'Orléans into Spain instead of my grandson, I should have found matters in a different position from what they are now." Brigault's reply, which was composed under the inspiration of the Duchesse du Maine, with the collaboration of Malézieu and de Polignac, rebutted this statement, and constituted another attack upon the Regent. Brigault sent his production to the Spanish Ambassador and a copy of it through Pompadour to the Duchess, who approved it and had it circulated among the public. She looked on this new agent as a devoted adherent of the Spanish cause, and was anxious to know him personally, it being her idea that she might make use of him to carry on a secret correspondence with Cellamare.

In August 1718 Pompadour conveyed Brigault to the Château des Tuileries, and conducted him to the apartment of Madame du Maine. He introduced him as one capable of dealing with matters of high importance, and as a man of unimpeachable trustworthiness. Brigault himself has related the story of his presentation.<sup>1</sup> He

<sup>1</sup> "Déclaration de l'Abbé Brigault," in Lemontey, vol. ii., p. 399.

was led through a little dark passage into the wardrobe, and thence into a small private chamber, where he found Madame du Maine and Malézieu. "The conversation opened with a few complimentary observations à propos of the 'Reply to Fitz Morris,' after which the discussion turned on the existing position of affairs." At length the Duchess read over to them a draft of a manifesto which she had drawn up for the King of Spain. It was a very voluminous document. The Abbé, finding it clumsy, redundant and ill-constructed, recast it and sent it to the Spanish Ambassador, between whom and Madame du Maine he henceforth acted as intermediary. It was he who conveyed the minister's replies to the Duchess, and it was through him that she applied to the Spanish Court for funds.

As a matter of fact, Brigault, who bragged so loudly of his confidential relations with the Duchess, and who already thought himself a conspirator of the same magnitude as Cardinal de Retz, made a great cry about very little wool, for only once had he been admitted to her presence. He then dazzled her with the torrential verbosity with which he related how he had been the means, when in Spain, of unmasking the plot of a certain Franciscan who was endeavouring to bring about a rising in Madrid in favour of the Duc d'Orléans. Laval and Pompadour kept him posted regarding the wishes and intentions of Madame du Maine. As he wielded rather a facile pen, he was entrusted with the task of dishing up the party manifestos. Editor and messenger—such were the two rôles he played in the conspiracy. He and Cellamare worked together on the secret papers that were sent to the Embassy before being forwarded to Spain.

One day Madame du Maine took a bolder step. It had long been her desire to have a personal interview with the Spanish Ambassador, and she now made arrange-

ments with him to come to see her by night at the Arsenal. Pompadour himself brought him, and Madame du Maine discussed the Treaty with him, explaining with great heat how strongly she considered it would prejudice the possible claims of Philip V. to the throne of France should Louis XV. happen to die. She further read over to him, and afterwards delivered into his hands, a memorandum in which were set forth the reasons which in her opinion should deter Philip V. from agreeing to the Treaty. The Ambassador appeared much pleased with the document, and took it away with him. At the conferences which followed, the means of opposing the treaties were eagerly discussed. Madame du Maine's proposition was that the Regency should be reconstituted and His Royal Highness deposed. In addition to the draft of the original memorial, she gave the Ambassador two letters, one addressed to the King of Spain and the other to all the Parliaments of the Kingdom. The Duc du Maine read and approved them, and this was sufficient to make him his wife's accomplice. From the manner in which the various duties were allotted, the Duchess humorously remarked that Pompadour was her Foreign Minister and Laval her Home Secretary.

Some few days after the night of Madame du Maine's interview with Cellamare, the Marquis de Pompadour came to the Arsenal with a document in which he had given an account "of everything that was going forward in the government," and to which he had added sundry reflections as to the reasons which should induce the King of Spain to aim at a friendly understanding with France. Madame du Maine fell out with the document on the grounds that sufficient pains had not been bestowed on its composition, and proceeded to correct it with pedantic care. Her quarrel with Pompadour's style had, she tells us, the unhappy result of leading her to fall in with the advice of Monsieur de Laval, which

was that she should do her utmost to obtain the assistance of other collaborators. Whatever may have been the literary merits or defects of the first attempt, it was thus that she came to produce a fresh draft for the manifesto. She mentioned it in vague terms to Polignac and Malézieu, who were not in favour of the Spanish policy. She even incurred their reproaches, and confessed afterwards that she regretted not having followed their advice. They refused, she says, to help her in her work. After a few days, however, Malézieu gave in, "because," says the despotic Duchess, "he could not help obeying me." At the second interview with Brigault, she recognised that she had after all but a man of straw to deal with, and reduced him to the rank of secretary of the executive committee at Sceaux. This committee further included the Chevalier du Ménénil, Malézieu, Dadvisart, the advocate-general, a Breton Jesuit called Père Tournemire, and finally Cardinal de Polignac. The members of this secret society agreed among themselves to prepare four principal documents, viz.: A Petition from the People of France to His Catholic Majesty, begging that the States General should be convened; two letters, of which one was to be addressed by Philip V. to the Boy King of France, and the other to all the Parliaments; and lastly, a proclamation of King Louis XV., giving orders for the summoning of the States General as requested. It was this latter that the Duchesse du Maine had drawn up. The confederates split themselves into two sub-committees, which exchanged and revised each other's productions. There were eternal bickerings regarding the choice of words, and they were forever indulging in mutual fault-finding on points of style or grammar. Besides the members of this committee, Madame du Maine had as collaborators her brother-in-law the Comte de Toulouse, with whom she had practically made up the quarrel, and who, though in greater

favour with the Regent than his brother, supported the du Maine policy. But the Spanish Ambassador still remained her most serviceable coadjutor. It was now that she was able finally to overcome her husband's scruples. An opportunity for action soon occurred, but unfortunately the means for acting effectively were not forthcoming. The provinces could scarcely be described as warm supporters of the Duc du Maine. The Comte de Toulouse was the only one of the party who could have become the centre and moving spirit of a faction, and how was the necessary enthusiasm to be kindled in him ?

In Brittany feeling was certainly running high, but in Languedoc and Guyenne, of which the Duc du Maine and the Comte d'Eu were nominally the governors, they found themselves devoid alike of authority and influence.<sup>1</sup> The soldiery, too, was just as phlegmatic and indifferent as the provinces. Reynold, the Major of the Swiss Guards, answered for the loyalty of his men to the Duc d'Orléans. The carabineers and the artillery were equally firm in their allegiance, and in the regiments entrusted by the late King to his natural children, the influence which the latter wielded during his lifetime had terminated with his reign. Barely forty officers (and they of no very high rank), actuated by personal interest, had offered their services to the Spanish King without really compromising themselves. The majority of them were officers on half-pay, or fighting-men whom the Peace of Utrecht had deprived of their employment. An inner knowledge of politics was certainly not their strong point, and the last thing they thought likely to give offence to the Regent was helping a grandson of Louis XIV. Lastly, who would there be to take command of the troops if they rebelled and displayed their readiness to throw in their cause with the enemy ? Not a soul ! The Duc du Maine had no

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Marmontel."

prestige as a soldier, and the men had no faith in him as a leader. He had, it is true, among his supporters men like Villars, d'Huxelles, and Tallard, who could have brought the qualities of resolution and daring to the undertaking if they could have made up their minds to declare against the Regent, but unfortunately they had no axe of their own to grind, and could not be moved. With regard to the rest of them, Villeroy, d'Aumont, de Mesmes and the others, it was not zeal they lacked, but force and courage. Thus the du Maine party could count on nothing, neither on popular sympathy, nor the support of the troops, nor the enthusiasm of the leaders. Nevertheless, Cellamare did not desist in his overtures to the Duc and Duchesse du Maine, who, or at all events the Duchess, responded to the best of their ability, and little by little he unfolded a regular plan of campaign which they agreed to follow. This plan Madame de Staal excuses herself from explaining "because," she comically remarks, "I understood nothing about it, nor very likely did they." But we may regard it as practically certain that the conspiracy, which was encouraged by Alberoni and known to Dubois from its very commencement, aimed at the following objects: To stir up Paris and the Provinces against the Duc d'Orléans on the ground that his rule was unlawful and oppressive; to lay hands on the Regent during some public function, to carry him off and imprison him at Toledo or Borjos, and to get the young King into their power on the plea "that His Majesty's life was not safe so long as it was in the hands of a prince in whose interests it would be to curtail it, and who was capable of doing so."<sup>1</sup> Then it was intended to kindle the flames of rebellion in Languedoc; to summon the States General of the Realm in order to restore to them their ancient rights, and to nullify by their means all enact-

<sup>1</sup> "Vie privée du Cardinal Dubois," vol. i., p. 48.



ments that had been passed since the death of Louis XIV., especially the setting aside of the Will and the Triple and Quadruple Alliances, these latter as being too inimical to Spanish interests; to give back the Parliaments their ancient liberties; to put an end to the system of Law; to set free the aristocracy from the arrogant encroachments of the Dukes and Peers; to accord Rome ample satisfaction in regard to the Bull *Unigenitus*; to induce the whole nation to support Alberoni's policy, and finally to place the Regency nominally in the hands of the King of Spain, but really in those of a deputy supported by a council who would administer the affairs of the Kingdom of France in the name of Philip V. As may be readily devined, this deputy was to be none other than the Duc du Maine. Had such duties fallen to his lot he had the ability to perform them, but he was wanting in the most important quality with which the chief of a government should be endowed, namely, force of character.

What gave rise to uneasiness in the Duchess's mind as regards Spain were the negotiations that were in progress between France, England, Holland and the Emperor. Cellamare, whose sincerity is perhaps open to question, was giving out that it was not so much his object to overthrow the Duc d'Orléans entirely as to bring his authority within bounds by compelling him to share his power with the legitimated princes, and to adopt a line of policy that would be less injurious to Spanish interests. Unanimity was far from prevailing as regards ways and means. Outside the Kingdom events were hurrying to a crisis. On the 11th August the English, under Byng, had defeated the Spanish fleet off the coast of Sicily. Being aware that France was also meditating an attack, Alberoni urged Cellamare to bring matters to a head—to put a match to the fuse. The signing of the Quadruple Alliance and the holding

of the Bed of Justice were to have the effect of bringing the plot into the practical stage.

The Treaty of London was regarded as a triumph for Dubois' diplomacy. The discovery of the plot was to be another addition to the success he owed to his talents as a detective. The town of Brives, in which he was born, has honoured this prototype of Fouché rather than of Talleyrand, by erecting a statue in his memory. The ignoble character of his private life should have rendered such a distinction, to say the least of it, superfluous, unless his admirers had graven on the pedestal the quatrain of which his contemporaries had made him a present. It is better suited than any other epitaph to the corrupter of the youth of Philippe d'Orléans, who, through his lessons, had become the leader of the roués.

Je suis Dubois dont on fait les cuistres,  
Et cuistre je fus autrefois  
Mais à présent je suis Dubois  
Dont on fait les ministres.

A second storm was to burst about the heads of the du Maines. The remonstrances and threats that proceeded from the Duchess furnished the pretext for the Bed of Justice of the 25th August 1718. When everything had been arranged between the Regent, the Duc de Bourbon, Dubois, Laval and the Keeper of the Seals, Saint-Simon was the first peer summoned by the Chief of the State, and the first to be initiated into the secret. He soon congratulated himself on having induced Philippe to hold this Bed of Justice at the Tuileries to checkmate the Parliament. For the public it was an absolute surprise. No one had an inkling of it in Paris. The night before, Madame du Maine had gone to have supper and to sleep at the Arsenal, where she was holding fête in those splendid salons whose Louis XV. woodwork, designed by Boffrand, still evokes our admiration. The

Duc du Maine, who had accompanied her, had only returned to his quarters on the ground-floor of the Tuileries a little before daybreak. Then, and then only, did he learn from Contades, the Major of the Guards, that a Bed of Justice was about to be held. He dared not stir abroad or send word to his wife. It was Dubois who had conceived the measure, his idea being to punish the Duc du Maine for having refused his support to the Quadruple Alliance, which the Regent's minister had brought off at London on the 2nd August. Though not in possession of any certain information regarding Madame du Maine's movements, the crafty Dubois gave the Regent to understand that the Duc and Duchesse were his enemies, and that they would have to be rendered harmless.

About eight o'clock in the morning, Monsieur du Maine proceeded as usual to the King's apartment in company with the Regent, who said to him, "You need not be present at the Bed of Justice." "Oh," replied the Duc carelessly, "I shall not be the subject of discussion there." "I am not sure about that," rejoined the Regent as he turned on his heel. Shortly after, he left with his brother to see what news he could gather at the Palais Royal. There he met the Maréchal de Villars, who, like himself, was making his way into the Regent's cabinet. "Some violent measures are afoot against my brother and myself—I am sure of it," he whispered. Then he went out again with the Comte de Toulouse. "He who quits the table loses the rubber," murmured Villars to the Marquis d'Effiat.

Meanwhile Saint-Simon betook himself to the Hôtel de Condé, where he was received "courteously, though not effusively," by the Duc de Bourbon. "Strike at the Parliament by all means," exclaimed the latter "but strike at Monsieur du Maine as well." "A dangerous game," quoth Saint-Simon. "It will prevent

a civil war," replied the Prince with an air of finality. From that moment the fate of the bastards was sealed.

The Bed of Justice was held in the King's antechamber on the 26th August, and the legitimated princes were immediately arraigned. The Regent was the first to speak on the question of depriving them of their rank, and he delivered himself as follows: "Sire, it having apparently been the desire of the late King that Your Majesty's education should be entrusted to the Duc du Maine, although by right of birth as well as by ancient precedent it was I who was entitled to the post, I offered no opposition by reason of the fact that I was still a minor. But that consideration being no longer operative, I ask that the honour should now be yielded up to me in accordance with my just and lawful claims."

Not a soul had the courage to show any fight to the Regent. All his proposals were agreed to and registered in his presence. The only peer who ventured to say a word was Villeroy, a warrior of the drawing-room type who had had a host of distinctions conferred on him by Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon. As tutor to Louis XV. he pretended to observe the most exaggerated precaution for the safety of his charge, as though the little King was perpetually in danger of being poisoned. Turning to the Regent, he said in a voice shaken with emotion, "It is all over, then, with the late King's wishes; Monsieur du Maine is most unfortunate!" "Monsieur," retorted the Duc d'Orléans in a flash, "the Duc du Maine is my brother-in-law, but I prefer an open enemy to a secret one."

The tone in which these words were uttered made it clear to the supporters of the Duc du Maine that they would do well to hold their peace. The old Maréchal bowed his head. It looked as though he were to share the prince's fall. The rumour had already gained currency that the two Ducs were to be arrested. This was an

error. The malcontents rallied round the Duc du Maine, or rather round his wife, who could not forgive him for acquiescing in his disgrace.

In furthering his own advancement Monsieur le Duc had the additional satisfaction of venting his spleen against his uncle, for whom, he said, he nourished the sort of aversion one sometimes feels for certain animals, an aversion which had its origin in monetary disputes, and especially in the lawsuit in which he said he had played the part of the shorn lamb.

While the Bed of Justice was being held, the two bastard princes, realising that they were the object of attack, remained in an adjoining room. There they awaited the verdict which it was but too easy to predict, the Duc du Maine in a state of deep dejection, the Comte de Toulouse more inclined to face the crisis with confidence and resolution, possibly because he foresaw that he would receive better treatment than his brother. Their absence from the Council Hall at a time when their cause was so decisively at stake could not and did not fail to excite the strong comment of their compeers. Though the public were not in the secret, their eyes were soon opened by the terms of the edict. By it their position was to be regulated merely according to the seniority of their peerages, and they were to enjoy no other distinctions or privileges than those to which their peerages entitled them. This meant that they were no longer to be regarded as princes of the blood. But an exception was made in a royal declaration which formed a supplement to the edict. The Comte de Toulouse, "in consideration of his personal merit," was during his lifetime to retain the honours, rank, prerogatives and privileges which he had enjoyed prior to the edict.

The treatment meted out to the two brothers was glaringly unequal. Never had the Parliament had to

swallow so humiliating an affront ; never had the ex-court party felt themselves more hopelessly undone. Saint-Simon was triumphant. The séance over, he dashed off to tell the Duchesse d'Orléans that the Regent had reduced the Duc du Maine to the rank of his peerage, but that a very special favour had been accorded to the Comte de Toulouse. Madame d'Orléans gave way to tears and exclaimed, " How unfortunate is my brother du Maine ; do you know what his crime is, what charge is brought against him ? " Saint-Simon aggravated the wound as he gave answer. " Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans is in possession of very strong proofs of his guilt."

His wife's grief was the sole drawback to the satisfaction felt by Philippe d'Orléans at the verdict of the Bed of Justice. He made every effort to console her, and she, having wept her full, fell back once more into her usual condition of apathy. On quitting the Council Chamber, the two brothers repaired to Monsieur du Maine's apartment, where they held a private conference with Cardinal de Polignac and their most intimate followers. The extreme alarm manifested by the Duc du Maine had made it impossible for him to undergo the excitement of personally attending the Bed of Justice. While her fate was being decided at the Tuileries, Madame du Maine, fully persuaded that her husband was taking part in the sitting, proceeded alone with her children and Mademoiselle de Launay to the Arsenal. There, gazing from the open windows of her splendid apartments on the yellow waters of the Seine as they flowed gently by, she might have told her heart that her hopes were ebbing even as they. She began to put anxious enquiries to those about her when she considered the sitting must have come to an end. Suddenly she uttered a loud shriek on word being brought by her domestics that matters had gone off very quietly, that her husband had been absent, and that the Tuileries would have to be quitted that very

day. The Duc du Maine sent for her, and she was conveyed to the Tuileries in a pitiable condition. Madame de Staal describes her state as one of prostration, as though all the life had gone out of her. When the order came to give up to Monsieur le Duc the apartments which, as superintendent of the King's education, her husband occupied at the Tuileries, she replied furiously, "Yes, I will give them up!" Forthwith she proceeded to have them dismantled, and in order that the task might be accomplished the more readily, she herself smashed to atoms mirrors, china, costly fittings, and anything that came to hand.

From the Tuileries she went to the Hôtel de Toulouse, where she had a violent scene with her brother-in-law. She could not endure the thought that he had been allowed to keep his place in the Council of the Regency, and that her husband had not. Bitterly she upbraided Monsieur de Toulouse, who stood before her calm and cold, with having unworthily accepted an advantage. It was, she urged, his duty, being the younger brother, to make common cause with her husband, and to refuse the rank of prince of the blood which had been bestowed on him, as it were, out of charity. In the face of such an outbreak, Monsieur de Toulouse began to waver. What weapons can a man employ against a woman? "Monseigneur," said his chief equerry, "you surely would not be so foolish as to have anything to do with the tantrums of such a madwoman?" Whereupon the Comte de Toulouse, recovering his equanimity, went and expressed his thanks to Philippe d'Orléans, and resumed his seat in the Regency Council. After this scene the resentment which Madame du Maine was compelled to stifle in public only grew the more bitter in her own heart. She cast about for another scapegoat, and it was one of her most intimate friends that she selected for the office. This was none other than President de Mesmes, who two days

previously had given her the hospitality of his house in the Rue Sainte-Avoye. In the evening she returned to sleep at the Tuileries, partly dismantled and ransacked by her own hands.

Monsieur de Mesmes was sent for by her next day and greeted with a torrent of abuse. The Duchess blamed him for everything that had happened, overwhelmed him with scorn, and refused to listen to any excuse, "sending him off," says Saint-Simon, "like the meanest lackey caught thieving." That is at any rate scarcely the attitude a mistress would have adopted towards her lover, and the incident is a convincing refutation of a certain calumny of which mention has been made. She now went back to the country, and there she fixed on her husband as a wild beast on its prey. Sometimes she would be prostrate with grief, sometimes storming with rage, and making their retreat at Sceaux re-echo to her furious transports because the Duc had been too much of a coward to defend his cause in person. She cried shame on him, and kept casting in his teeth that she was a grand-daughter of the Great Condé, that she had not degenerated. She lamented that she was not a man, adding that woman though she was, she would not suffer herself to be beaten. To onslaughts such as these the unhappy husband could only reply with tears. He protested his innocence to the Regent, and begged that he might be allowed to plead his cause. If he were guilty, then let him be punished, but if innocent, then let them treat him on the same footing as the Comte de Toulouse. The Regent, who thought it an absurd weakness on the part of his brother-in-law to let himself be dominated by a fury of a woman, did not even do him the honour of receiving him. Madame du Maine determined to act alone. She flattered herself that her husband's very timidity would help her to throw dust in the Regent's eyes when she came to put her daring plans into execution.



She took as her model the Duchess de Braganza, who in the previous century had led a vast conspiracy without a hint of it ever reaching her husband, whom she had made an accomplice and placed on the throne of Portugal almost in spite of himself. She had the greatest admiration for Alberoni, and confidently relied on the assistance she had made him promise her. Madame de Maintenon by no means shared her illusions. "The downfall of the Duc du Maine at the Bed of Justice gave him," she said, "his first death-blow."<sup>1</sup>

In a letter to her niece she wrote, "I wish Madame d'Orléans were well for Monsieur du Maine's sake. His plight makes my heart bleed." It was in fact her brother's cause the Duchesse d'Orléans had now to plead before her husband, whereas after the deaths that took place in the Royal Family, it had been her husband she had been compelled to defend against her brother. "They say," Madame de Maintenon went on, "that the Comte de Toulouse is quite willing to give way a little for the sake of peace because he is sensible, but that the Duc du Maine steadily refuses to abate a jot of his claims, which people will describe as weakness in him. Monsieur du Maine considers that it is better to be stripped of one's honours by violence than by consent."<sup>2</sup> "I was astonished on reading of Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans' indulgent treatment of the Parliament—it may be he will repent of it. The Duc du Maine, who has just quitted my room, is sensitive in everything, but most assuredly not weak. Never were spoken sadder or braver words. I try to look on the bright side of things as far as our princes are concerned, then again I am afraid of receiving fresh wounds unless I take the worst for granted. Their pamphlets seem to me good, but their adversaries are powerful. And what can mere paper avail against the

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.

<sup>2</sup> Madame de Maintenon to Madame de Caylus," 21st July 1716.

influence of Monsieur le Duc ? ” The motherly sorrows of this old woman with the burden of her eighty years heavy upon her are profoundly touching.

Madame du Maine's Machiavellian designs were of a truth gigantic, and far beyond the strength of a woman. Pondering unceasingly on her schemes, it was her dream to overthrow the Regent and to set up the King of Spain in his place, and under him, as a sort of viceroy, the Duc du Maine, with a council consisting of men devoted to their cause. With such thoughts in her mind, she let loose an army of quill-drivers and pamphleteers against the Regent. “ If my enemies slumber, ” she cried, “ we too will sleep. If they awaken, we too will be on the alert. ” News of her violent transports began to get about, and Madame la Palatine considered them highly diverting. “ People give various accounts of the Duchesse du Maine, ” she writes, “ some say she beat her husband and smashed her mirrors and any other breakable things she could lay hands on ; others aver that she did not utter a word, but simply wept. ” And then, further on, “ The little midget protests that she has more courage than her husband, her son or her brother-in-law, and that, like another Jael, she will slay the Regent with her own hand, that she will drive a nail into his head. ” The mother therefore bids her son to be on his guard, but Philippe laughs and tosses his head as if he were listening to idle tales.

As yet he hesitated to act sternly, so greatly did he fear the tears and transports of the Duchesse du Maine. “ She introduces pathos into her comedies, ” writes la Palatine. Moreover, Philippe thought more of power than of dignities, and showed no inclination to quarrel with his brother-in-law about the numerous offices which the latter still retained. But Dubois, egged on by Saint-Simon, was fain to punish the presumption of the Parliamentarians by stripping the Duc du Maine of the last remnants of his power.

## CHAPTER X

Second period of the conspiracy (end of September 1718)—Madoiselle de Launay entrusted with the correspondence—The Baron de Walef—His embassy to Spain—Secret correspondence between Madrid and Sceaux—Porto-Carrero comes to Paris—Madame du Maine removes Pompadour and Laval—The Queen of Spain openly directs the conspiracy—Cellamare's proposal—Manifesto by the Duchesse du Maine—Her hesitations—Propagandist movements in the provinces—Brittany is in the plot—The Duchess is lampooned—Her interview with Pompadour (mid-November 1718)—Misplaced confidence of the Duchess—Dubois on the trial of the conspirators—Cellamare on the look-out for a special messenger (December)—Porto-Carrero's expedition—An adventure at la Fillon's—The indiscretion of Buvat, the copyist—Attitude and proceedings of Dubois—Arrest of Porto-Carrero (5th December).

**A**LBERONI, for whom matters were looking black, was beginning to get desperate. Everywhere he had schemes on foot, but France and England were the principal scenes of his machinations. It was therefore high time for Cellamare to get to work with more ardour, if not with greater confidence, than he had displayed at the commencement of the year. To Pompadour he expressed a desire to see the Duchess again. The latter gave him another rendezvous at the Arsenal, whither he went with Pompadour and Laval towards the end of September. He declared that the King was more than ever determined not to sign the treaty, that His Majesty preserved most pleasant recollections of Madame du Maine, and that he had done everything in his power to bind himself to France as Madame du Maine had proposed, but that the agreements the Regent had entered into with the Emperor

and England had proved an insurmountable obstacle to the realization of his policy.

The avowal was scarcely encouraging. He added that the King of Spain had resolved not to go to war with France, and that he would do all that was possible to avoid it. But this was not what the du Maine party wanted. The important thing was to persuade Philip V. to manifest his intentions in the form of pamphlets which might be distributed throughout the kingdom. Cellamare protested that this was precisely what His Catholic Majesty wished to do. Meanwhile he had commanded him to announce to all the French people that he was as jealous of the honour of France as of his own, and that he would shed his last drop of blood to uphold it, and further, that he believed that the treaty which he was asked to sign was no less injurious to the interests of the country than to his own.<sup>1</sup>

In the subsequent consultations they discussed the best way of opposing these treaties which were so hostile to the King of Spain. Madame du Maine was for calling together the States General and remodelling the Regency. "Summon the States General," was indeed her everlasting refrain, though it may well be asked what benefit the measure could have brought her. Minds like hers are ever eager to stir up the waters, hoping to land a fish from the muddy stream.

Utterly insensible to danger, whether for her cause or for herself, the Duchess's one topic was setting the southern and western provinces in a blaze. She hoped that if not the title at all events the authority of the Regent would pass into her husband's hands. Though she was pleased to pretend that she understood nothing of the plot, Mademoiselle de Launay had as a matter of fact become one of the most skilful assistants in the correspondence which was exchanged between her mistress and Cellamare,

<sup>1</sup> "Lemontey," vol. ii., p. 426.

the value of whose promises of help was more or less problematical. Pompadour and Brigault, those two shoddy statesmen, spent their time in revising the Duchess's despatches to the Spanish Embassy. Such feeble instruments were hardly adequate to designs so extensive. Contemporary evidence is unanimous in stating that the astonishment was great when it was seen how little the leaders were qualified to command, and how ludicrously lacking in position and savoir-faire were the men whom the Duchess trusted to put her policy into execution. Nevertheless, the plot gathered shape after the conquest of Sicily and Sardinia by the Spaniards.

Acting upon instructions from the Queen of Sceaux, Mademoiselle de Launay proceeded to Paris to consult Père Tournemire regarding the despatch of a special emissary to Spain, and the Jesuit, who had formerly been Confessor to King Philip V., indicated a certain individual as suitable for the mission. The matter had to be referred to Madame du Maine, and as she approved of the selection, her confidante returned forthwith to apprise Père Tournemire. "He sent me his man," she says, "a certain Baron de Walef of Liège; a wit with a taste for versifying, and possibly more of a poet than a politician. He had fought in Flanders for Queen Anne, plotted at Saint Germain with the widow of James II., and he arrived at Sceaux with an armful of poems. He was introduced to the Duchess, who opened the conversation by saying, 'Read me some of your verses.'"

Walef informed her of his approaching departure for Spain, and offered her his services. She commissioned him to see the King of Spain on her behalf, and to persuade him to lend his support to the Duc du Maine and his oppressed family. He was further to acquaint himself with the views of the Spanish Court regarding the treatment of the du Maines, and also to discover what policy would be pursued by Madrid in the event of the death

of Louis XV.<sup>1</sup> It was, of course, Alberoni who was to introduce Walef to Philip V. The line he was to take in order to bring the Spanish monarch to regard the conspiracy with favour was to dwell on ties of kinship and the regard he would naturally entertain for the wishes of his grandfather, and so forth.

Being without a stiver for the journey, Walef conceived the expedient of sending the Duchess a costly set of china, with the suggestion that she should buy it from him. She declined the offer, but gave him a hundred louis, and entrusted him at the same time with a kind of letter of credence, without any superscription, in which she stated that, having confidence in his probity, she granted him authority to speak in her name. No sooner had she done this, however, that her heart misgave her, and she carefully concealed the matter from everyone, her husband not excepted.

And so Walef sets out. For a long time nothing was heard of him, but at last a letter came, not from Madrid, but, marvellous to relate, from Rome! He had taken Italy on his way, with the egregious notion of disclosing his business to the Comte de Gallas, an envoy of the Emperor, who was then at war with Philip V. The excuse he offered was that he was endeavouring to discover the attitude of the King of Sardinia. The Duchess gave him a sound rating, and ordered him to go on to Spain at once, giving him strict injunctions to do what he was told, and nothing else.

But that did not suit Walef's book at all, his sole idea being to play the game for his own advantage. On arriving at Madrid he retaliated by informing the Duchess "that the King of Spain was very favourably disposed towards him." Walef had fabricated from beginning to end a document—a ridiculous farrago, Madame du

<sup>1</sup> "Lettre de Pompadour," Lemontey, vol. ii., "Histoire de la Régence."

Maine called it—purporting to be a treaty of partition of the Kingdoms of France, Spain and the States of Sicily and Savoy, which was to become effective in the event of the King's death. He had the audacity to apply to the Duchess for authority to conclude this remarkable agreement, the very thought of which was enough to drive her wild. Perceiving that it was impossible for her to control the antics of this literary flutter-pate, she had to take measures to render him harmless, and therefore sent word to Alberoni, through Pompadour, not to attach the slightest importance to his fantastic utterances. She herself ceased writing to her envoy and would allow no further instructions to be sent to him. In mortal fear lest he should reveal what he already knew regarding the insurrection that was afoot, she begged the King of Spain to keep him under his eye by appointing him to some lucrative post.<sup>1</sup> So ended this first intrigue which, although the two had really no direct connection, may be regarded as the prelude to the Cellamare conspiracy.

Whatever denials the Duchesse du Maine subsequently felt it necessary to make, there is no doubt that secret correspondence to the detriment of the French Government was carried on between Sceaux and Madrid. The incriminating messages were interlined in invisible ink. All the letters that came from Spain were addressed to Mademoiselle de Launay. Pompadour and Brigault used to revise the productions of the Sceaux committee, and delivered them by stealth into Cellamare's hands. The latter dispatched them to Madrid by express messenger, who left Paris the first time on the 1st August 1718. The papers containing the various grievances of the malcontents were made into a packet and sewn up inside the messenger's saddle.

The business nearly came to grief in consequence

<sup>1</sup> Lemontey, "Histoire de la Régence."

of a host of untoward happenings, of which Dubois' spies took full advantage. To start with, Malézieu, the old day-dreamer, was stupid enough to mislay the draft of one of the most dangerous letters. Then a number of documents were copied and distributed by a traitorous hireling. Next, a little note in cipher was unearthed among dispatches received by Cellamare from the French Ambassador at Madrid, announcing that one Porto-Carrero (yet another abbé), a twenty-two year old nephew of the Spanish Cardinal of that name, was being sent to Paris as a secret emissary. Dubois therefore knew perfectly well which way the wind was blowing.

What had chiefly led up to the Bed of Justice and brought about the downfall of the Duc du Maine was the fact that in high quarters he was supposed to be too closely allied with the Parliament. Several members of the Supreme Court had been suspected of fomenting the revolution which the du Maine party had in view, but proofs were wanting. The Parliament, who had drained the cup of humiliation, now solemnly dissociated itself from any participation in the degradation of the Duc du Maine, and ceased to discharge its functions as a Court of Justice. The members of the Breton Parliament threw in their lot with their confrères of Paris, and forwarded a remonstrance to the King, which sufficiently revealed to the Regent that Spain already had a numerous following in that province. The Bed of Justice had been too much for Madame du Maine's patience. She was eager to burn her boats and to stake everything on a final hazard, but her own family had no enthusiasm for her projects. Her children were too young and her husband too weak to restrain her, but in her mother the Duchess encountered a more formidable stumbling block. Realising how greatly this staid and level-headed princess was opposed to an enterprise so wild, she made every endeavour to minimise



her own responsibility in the movement, and to throw the blame for the whole business on the Monsieur le Duc. It thus came about that young Henri Louis no longer dared to face his grandmother, notwithstanding the unfailing respect and affection with which he had conducted himself towards her.

Despite all Madame du Maine's shortcomings, Madame la Princesse was very indulgent towards her daughter. She therefore only delivered herself of the gentlest ex-postulations, of which the little Duchess, as usual, took not the slightest heed. Polignac and Malézieu likewise discouraged her from running any risks, but she went her way regardless of their warnings, and said nothing about the sequel of her interviews with Pompadour and Laval, who were bolder but less prudent counsellors than they. For the moment, however, Laval was discarded, and Madame du Maine consented to see what could be done at the Palais-Royal to restore her husband to favour, and to bring him again into possession of what she termed "the rights of the Duc du Maine." So she first of all betook herself to her sister-in-law, Madame d'Orléans.

"Messieurs du Maine and de Toulouse are your brothers," said she, "their misfortunes are yours, my sister, and I ask, nay, I claim your assistance." "Alas!" was the reply of La Montespan's daughter, "it is but little use relying on the Duc du Maine. Wit, elegance, talent are his, but not political courage." None knew that better than the little Duchess. Still, she persevered and had the spirit to go to the Regent himself, and let loose upon him a torrent of recriminations. She left the Regent's presence well pleased with the effect of her tirade, and the Regent himself still better pleased at his own success in pacifying her. Henceforth all her thoughts were monopolised by the desire to put into execution the words which she had so rashly let

fall at Sceaux before the Ducs d'Aumont and La Force when she said that "she would set the whole kingdom in a blaze rather than forego her prerogatives."<sup>1</sup>

She interpreted Philippe's modification of the Parliamentary decree as a sign of weakness, and considered herself in a fair way to carry her point. To stand by her against the Regent she had won over a section of the nobility, the whole of Brittany and the Parliament of Paris. In Spain she could count on Alberoni. Speaking generally, the Quadruple Alliance and the existing method of administering the public funds were not regarded with favour in France. She therefore had an additional ally in the latent force of popular sentiment. But the first task was to lull the suspicions of the government, much more on the "qui vive" than people at Sceaux appeared to recognise.

The Queen of Spain, Elizabeth Farnese, was the supreme director of the conspiracy, Alberoni the principal instigator, while Cellamare and the Duchesse du Maine constituted themselves their most active agents. Senators, Bishops, Cardinals, Grandees of the Realm, whole religious orders, had joined the movement. Keenly alert to passing events in Paris and the Provinces, the Spanish Ambassador continued to rally fresh supporters to his master's cause. A few French officers had promised their services, and he talked unceasingly of bringing things to a head. The destruction of the Spanish Fleet by the English and the rupture of negotiations by the Marquis de Nancre had contributed to increase his impatience. On the 1st August, Cellamare had sent an envoy-extraordinary into Spain with three papers relating to the conspiracy. The Duchesse du Maine was engaged in drawing up a manifesto, but neither Malézieu nor Polignac, her customary secretaries, was willing to lend his assistance.

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Saint-Simon."

Their only connection with the matter was to give some advice on questions of style. Pompadour was instructed to convey the document to the Spanish Embassy. In it were set forth the dangerous consequences that would ensue if Spain became a party to the treaty between France, the Emperor, England and the States General of Holland. Cellamare succeeded in transmitting this wordy production to Philip V. It was expected to produce a mighty effect. In reality it made about as much impression on the Court of Spain as the flowery eloquence of the irresponsible Walef.

Though the Duc du Maine had not dared to suppress this latest offspring of the revolutionary pen, he saw clearly enough the catastrophe that was bound to follow it. He therefore took his courage in both hands and proceeded to read his wife a lecture. She herself began to scent the approach of danger, and the Duc took advantage of her chastened frame of mind to extort from her a promise that she would see none of the people who were under suspicion of being involved in the intrigue. She was obliged to refuse a meeting proposed by the Marquis de Pompadour. "Your memorial is a most pernicious thing," she wrote in a moment of agitation. "I beseech you, do not send it." Are we to interpret this as an act of wifely obedience—such would be mightily unlike her customary attitude—or shall we rather look upon it as indicating a first faint premonition that she was staking her peace and her freedom on a very poor card? It was now but rarely that de Launay was sent to interview the conspirators, and upon these last conferences lowered the gloomy presage of impending disaster. The Duchess was already pretty deeply entangled when the whole fabric of the conspiracy began to show signs of collapsing. Though she had succeeded in enlisting a few nobles in each of the provinces, though she had beaten up the country in search of recruits for her

revolutionary band, it is nevertheless undeniable that, as Madame de Staal puts it, "few had risen to the bait."

Cellamare proved a Job's comforter. His attempts at consolation only aggravated the wound. On the 7th November 1718 he wrote Alberoni as follows: "I have given our friends to understand that, in the event of force being used against me, I should have a spot near at hand whence I could continue our correspondence." The conspirators, equally blind, had not yet been able to gauge the seriousness of the danger which threatened them. Dubois had formed a pretty accurate estimate of the situation when he wrote to the Marquis de Nancré on the 25th October saying, "There is no intrigue, no underhand trick, that Prince de Cellamare has not employed to stir up trouble in France."

Outside Paris the Breton nobility still appeared the most doughty supporters of the conspiracy. The sturdy independence of the Breton character showed itself then as it had ever done in troublous times. A year ago the Parliament of Brittany had refused the dole which was generally voted by acclamation. The Regent, who had at first dissolved the session, was afterwards weak enough to rescind his order. Nevertheless some leaven of revolt was still fermenting among the Bretons. In August 1718 an association was formed at Rennes to refuse the tax a second time. Had the other provinces followed suit, a revolution might possibly have been kindled throughout the country.

Alberoni profited by the situation to stir up Brittany, and to introduce secretly into France some troops disguised as salt-smugglers under the orders of one Colineri, who was to attach himself to the revolutionary party. There was even some question of assembling a Spanish Fleet off the coast of Brittany and of seizing Port Louis. Seven or eight hundred Breton gentlemen assembled

and decided to club together in order to send one of their number as an emissary to Spain.

The Duchesse du Maine continued her machinations almost in broad daylight, heedless of the lampoons and rhymes which were spread abroad concerning her. As Christmas Day drew near noëls were circulated celebrating the homage paid before the cradle of the Saviour. There were couplets on every member of the Royal Family, on the Duc de Bourbon, on the Prince and Princesse de Conti, and lastly on the du Maines. The "bâtards très soumis" were presented as rendering their homage before the cradle.

But the rebellion was not taken seriously; the public began to treat it as a joke. "What do you think of the people the Spanish Ambassador has chosen for his confederates?" wrote Caumartin to the Marquise de Balleroy. "I never set eyes on such a ludicrous crew."<sup>1</sup>

On the 15th November the Duchess had a secret meeting with Pompadour. He read her over two fresh documents he had prepared; the one a draft manifesto for Philip V., the other a sort of censure on the government, combined with a number of proposals to be laid before the Spanish King, and designed to procure his co-operation with France. At a later date she completely disavowed all connection with these writings, affirming that she had ever shown great repugnance to encouraging people to write pamphlets.

The Duchess continued to breathe fire and fury against the Regent, vowing she would shed her last drop of blood rather than forego her revenge, "even if she had to gain it by her children's swords." Everywhere and always she was committing indiscretions, and telling her secrets to people who immediately disclosed them. Occasionally, when she did dissemble, her dissimula-

<sup>1</sup> Edouard de Barthélemy, "les Correspondants de la Marquise de Balleroy," 1883, vol. i., p. 394.

tion was not invariably appropriate. When a princess, who was hail-fellow-well-met with any adventurer sharked up from Heaven knows where, thought it necessary to disguise her movements from her faithful servant Mademoiselle de Launay, her mistrust was undeniably misplaced. The good girl gave proof in due course by her self-sacrifice how worthy she was of the entire confidence of her mistress. She was, moreover, cultivated enough to correct the various documents that were written at Sceaux. Madame du Maine ever regarded style as more important than matter, and on productions of the most minor consequence she would bestow the greatest care, and reject with exclamations of disgust whatever did not strike her as being absolutely free from blemish.

A favourable opportunity was awaited for transmitting the secret documents to the King of Spain. There was no time to be wasted. Cellamare, who had lost heart, had asked to be recalled, but Alberoni replied by telling him not to leave Paris until he had "blown up all the mines." "Mines without powder," exclaimed the Ambassador scornfully when these orders came to him.

Meanwhile, Dubois, long since on the trail of the conspiracy, was taking count in the recesses of his closet, like a spider in his web, of every suspicious circumstance that came to his ears or that was brought to his notice by his spies. Messages, rendezvous, conferences between the plotters, could not take place without attracting their attention. The Duchess was kept under observation, and all her movements were carefully watched. No one went to her house by night or day, disguised or openly, whose identity was unknown. Nevertheless, despite this surveillance, there is the possibility that nothing would have been discovered had it not been for a two-fold coincidence.

It was in the month of December that the moment at

last seemed to have arrived for plain speaking to Madrid "regarding matters and names." Cellamare was anxious to forward to Alberoni a model of the letters which had been composed at Sceaux for circulation in France as well as the other documents concerning which it was necessary to consult the Spanish minister. But not daring to trust papers of such high importance to any of his own men, he began to look about him for a specially trustworthy messenger into whose hands he might deliver them. Instructions received from Alberoni indicated two young Spanish abbés for the undertaking, one of whom hailed from The Hague and the other from Madrid, and who had met, seemingly by chance, in Paris. The former was the son of Montleone, the Spanish Ambassador in London; the second was Porto-Carrero of whom mention has already been made. Montleone the elder was known as having consistently favoured a union between the two branches of the House of Bourbon. His name therefore seemed to remove any shadow of suspicion from his son. Nor was Porto-Carrero a name less favoured in France. The presence of these two young men in the capital had in it nothing of a nature to give umbrage to the French Government. The Marquis de Pompadour considered he was doing a very astute thing when he proposed that the post of emissary should be given to this young abbé, whose prudence, discretion and intrepidity were so highly belauded.

Thus Porto-Carrero became courier to the Spanish Embassy at Paris. Without revealing to him what his dispatches contained or the risks in which his mission involved him, they entrusted him with the details of their plan, as well as a list of the conspirators, Cellamare having had copies made of all the papers. His carriage was provided with a false bottom, in which was stowed his dangerous burden. He was also given a special passport from the King in view of the coming rupture

between France and Spain, as well as directions for his journey via the West of France to the Pyrenees.

He set out early in December without greatly troubling to conceal his departure. Taking matters pretty leisurely, he travelled with a single servant in company with Monteleone and the Chevalier de Mira, a Spanish banker who had settled in England, but who was "wanted" for bankruptcy by the English police. The first part of the journey went off without mishap, but an incident of the most trifling nature was later to bring the whole scheme to grief. One of the secretaries at the Spanish Embassy had an assignation at a certain house of ill-repute kept by La Fillon, a rather low-class courtesan. He arrived on the scene somewhat late and being anxious to excuse himself, he was foolish and indiscreet enough to throw the blame on some urgent despatches which he had been obliged to prepare in a great hurry for the departure of a secret messenger. "The tiniest causes often make or mar great destinies," remarks the author of "*Le Siècle de Louis XIV.*," à propos of this matter. The wench was so impressed by the air of mysterious importance with which the young fly-by-night, who had divested himself of his Castilian hauteur, made his declaration, that she hurried away to relate the matter to Dubois, who in his turn lost no time in communicating it to the Regent.

As a reward for her treachery, the Regent gave La Fillon an income of twelve thousand livres per annum and thirty thousand down in hard cash. She subsequently made a runaway match and became a Countess, eventually dying in the odour of respectability in a little town in Auvergne. The pride she felt at the part she had played led her later on to divulge the whole story. If she did not save France, she at least preserved the Regent's power for him, and possibly also his life.

There was a second chance circumstance that helped



to give the game away. "One of the things which excite a smile in the history of the period," says Lemontey,<sup>1</sup> "is the confiding readiness with which the conspirators gave out their documents to be copied." The Abbé Brigault, being in need of a penman to transcribe the manifestos, instructions, etc., which the Executive Committee of the Duchesse du Maine desired to send into Spain, had recourse to the caligraphic talents of a clerk in the Bibliothèque Royale called Buvat. Thinking he could rely on his man, he gave him this work to perform, though it included a very large number of compromising papers, even a detailed report drawn up by Cellamare's own hand. The Ambassador had handed it to his secretaries to put into cipher and re-copy, and they had passed on the task to Buvat. This went on in the King's library, of all places in the world! Buvat proceeded each day to the residence of the Spanish Ambassador, which was close at hand in the Rue Neuve-des-Petits-Champs. It did not take him long when transcribing the papers that were handed to him to gather what was in the wind.

In terror of being involved in some anti-government plot, the poor man went to communicate his apprehensions to Monsieur de la Houssaye, Dubois' secretary. "I am ill-paid," he said, "and knowing Spanish, I have found a job for my spare time in the Secretary's department of the Spanish Embassy, where the remuneration is more liberal. But I see things going on there against the Regency. . . ." He was thereupon appealed to as a Frenchman and as a loyal subject of the King, and advised to unburden himself to the Abbé Dubois. They conducted him by a secret staircase into the minister's room, where he found himself face to face with that "little, thin, scraggy, mean-looking creature with the yellow wig and the weasel's face," whom Saint-Simon has depicted for us with such a graphic touch.

<sup>1</sup> "Histoire de la Régence."

While Buvat was relating all that he had previously told the secretary, Dubois listened with a careless air, as though the narrative had no great interest for him. The tale finished, he dismissed the clerk with the injunction that he was to go on with his copying work at Cellamare's, and then come every night to give an account of all that he had seen or heard. And so we have Buvat combining the offices of secretary to Cellamare and spy to Dubois! The Abbé was careful to draw his master's attention to the skill with which he had unearthed the plot. Never for a moment did he entertain the smallest doubt that Madame de Maintenon and the Duchesse du Maine were responsible for the whole matter. He was in error concerning Madame de Maintenon, but with regard to Madame du Maine his conjectures were tolerably near the mark. Having served his purpose, Buvat was flung adrift and eventually fell on evil days, reaping no other reward for his services than to be threatened with the gallows.

One night, just before twelve, Dubois had retired to rest, when word was brought to him that Porto-Carrero had set out accompanied by young Monteleone and an English swindling banker who was trying to pass himself off as a Spaniard. Dubois immediately gave orders for an officer named Mesnil to take some men and ride after them, and not to draw rein till he had run them to earth. Mesnil also carried with him a warrant, signed by the King, empowering him to seize Mira and his companions together with all their papers.

On the 5th December 1718<sup>1</sup> the trio were nearing Poitiers, when their carriage upset while crossing a ford. Dubois' sleuth-hounds, hot on the scent, did not fail to observe the anxiety displayed by Porto-Carrero concerning the safety of his valise. After a time the vehicle was

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Madame de Staal," vol. ii., p. 49. Dangeau, "Journal," 9th December, p. 545, Saint-Simon.





righted, and the travellers resumed their journey with their pursuers now drawing closer and closer. Finally, at Poitiers, just as the horses were being taken out, Porto-Carrero was made a prisoner. The conveyance was ransacked and the fatal papers were immediately sealed and sent back by express messenger to Dubois. The emissary was suffered to continue his journey, but his trunks had been rifled and the object of his mission had disappeared. As for Cellamare, it was only the merest chance that left him a loophole of escape.

One of Porto-Carrero's postilions, mounted on a spavined hack, had been unable to keep pace with his master, and, in consequence, found himself two stages in the rear. Somewhere in the neighbourhood of Angers he encountered the regular courier jogging along on his way from Poitiers to Paris. "What news?" says the postilion. "Nothing," came the reply, "except that they've just nabbed an English bankrupt at Poitiers and a Spanish abbé, who seems to have had some important papers about him." "My master, for a wager!" said the postilion to himself as he wheeled round on his tracks. Without delay he got himself a fresh horse and spurred furiously back to Paris, easily outstripping the Regent's messenger, who did not reach the city till nightfall. On his arrival, the postilion was able to give Cellamare a full account of all that had happened at Poitiers a good twelve hours before Dubois, at length in possession of the news, could send orders to his men to make a raid on the Spanish Embassy. Of all these events the Duchesse du Maine as yet knew nothing.

## CHAPTER XI

Discovery of the plot—Arrest of the ringleaders—Calmness of the Regent—La Palatine's fury—The du Maines convicted of being the ringleaders of the plot—Public opinion on the conspiracy—The Duchess learns that all is discovered (10th December 1718)—Her audience at the Palais-Royal—The first prisoners—The Cabinet Council of the 25th December—Arrest of the Duc and Duchesse du Maine (29th December)—The Duc du Maine removed to Doullens—Arrest of Mademoiselle de Launay.

**A**T Sceaux the Duchesse du Maine was working up the plot with ever increasing energy and indiscretion ; but the secret had been sold to Dubois from the very beginning. He had been tenderly fostering it till it burst its shell, in continual fear and trembling lest a sudden fit of prudence, an unwelcome access of repentance among the conspirators, should deprive him of the opportunity of taking his revenge at one single stroke for all his mortifications. He communicated his sentiments to the Regent, who, with his constitutional apathy, was viewing with comparative unconcern the manœuvres that were in progress at Madrid and Sceaux. The Duchess, too, was handicapped in the fight, for the Regent had right on his side and enjoyed a certain degree of popularity among the people. He was soon to be able to count the detestation of the plot, the ridiculous circumstances of its miscarriage, and the honour of a spirited and magnanimous pardon as additional assets in his favour with the public.

After the capture of Porto-Carrero the courier who brought the fatal valise from Poitiers reached the Abbé

Dubois at the very moment the Duc d'Orléans was going into the opera. The performance over, the minister, having run through the papers, came to impart the news to the Regent in his box. "No business to-night," said the Prince, "all that can wait till to-morrow," and dismissing Dubois on the pretext that he could not have had time to take in the contents of the bundle of papers, he departed to shut himself up for a night's carousal with his roués. The first part of the morning rarely found him very capable of transacting business. His head would still be heavy with the fumes of wine, and at such moments the Secretary of State could get him to sign practically anything. Dubois took advantage of this fact to give him an account of everything he had found in the valise. Saint-Simon will have it that he only showed him what suited his purpose, and never allowed the Regent to examine any of the documents for himself. "The Prince's blind confidence on this occasion was incomprehensible," he says.

In the valise there was a little note in cipher<sup>1</sup> from the Ambassador of Spain, informing the Court of Madrid that he was sending them the Abbé Porto-Carrero with important papers addressed to Philip V. There were also duplicate documents in Malézieu's handwriting, letters from the Duchesse du Maine, manifestos, draft proclamations, a full list of the persons engaged in the conspiracy, etc., all being written in French and Spanish. From this collection it was pretty plain that the design had been to stir up a part of the Kingdom to revolt, and to excite a general civil war. Cellamare had not the good sense to avail himself of his twelve hours' start to put himself in a posture of defence and to burn his papers. He contented himself with warning some of the people most deeply implicated of what had happened at Poitiers, and was simpleton enough to go to Dubois and demand

<sup>1</sup> "Archives de la Bastille," MSS. de l'Arsenal, 10364.

the return of his papers. The Regent's wily minister, who played the part of Père Tristan to his master, in high glee at the turn things had taken, promised him he would let him have them. He assumed great geniality of manner, and dismissed the Spaniard with all his misgivings allayed. So thoroughly reassured was the unlucky Ambassador, that it never entered his head to destroy either the documents relating to the conspiracy or his own correspondence with Alberoni. Twenty-four hours later all his papers had been confiscated and taken off to the Louvre. In singularly daring terms the Duchesse du Maine had written a letter to be sent by Philip V. to Louis XV., which involved a formal rupture of the Peace of Utrecht and a withdrawal of the renunciation of his claims to the throne of France. We give it below, and it will not be denied that it was an unwarrantable interference on the part of a foreign Sovereign with the affairs of France.

Monsieur mon frère et neveu,

Since the day when Providence called me to fill the Throne of Spain, I have not lost sight for a single instant of the obligations which my birth lays upon me. Louis XIV. of eternal memory is ever present to my mind. It seems as though I still hear the voice of that great prince saying as he embraced me at the moment of our farewell, "The Pyrenees exist no longer!"

Your Majesty is my brother's sole offspring. My dear Spaniards, who love me with deep affection and are secure in the confidence that that affection is reciprocated, feel no jealousy at the sentiments I am expressing to you. . . . I indulge the hope that my personal interests are still held dear by a nation which has nourished me in its bosom. With what eyes, then, will your faithful subjects view the conclusion of a treaty which is injurious to me, and, in reality, to yourself. Ever since the time when your exhausted finances became unequal to supplying the ordinary necessities of a time of peace, there has been a desire that Your Majesty should join hands



with my deadliest enemy and make war upon me unless I consent to hand over Sicily to the Archduke.

Never will I put my signature to such conditions ; to me they are intolerable.

The opening of the captured papers was carried out at the Embassy, and since the names of the conspirators were disclosed, it sufficed to bring about the downfall of all who were involved in the plot. Cellamare's letters to Alberoni made it plain that the law of nations had been violated. Dubois brought the matter before the Council of the Regency on the 9th December, and gave orders for the arrest of the Spanish Ambassador, who was forthwith conducted to the frontier.<sup>1</sup>

Next day the minister issued to the whole of France, to the Archbishops, Bishops, Presidents of the Courts of Justice, and to the Governors of Provinces a circular letter which concluded with the following words :—

“ If, as is scarcely credible, certain of His Majesty's subjects have been capable of lending their ears to seditious proposals, you will make use to the fullest extent of the authority entrusted to you to maintain the public peace.”

The publication of the impounded documents, the idea of the wily Dubois, provoked a cry of fury at Madrid, a cry of revolt in Brittany, and a great burst of laughter in Paris.

The Bastille opened its portals to a motley assortment of guests. The Abbé Brigault cavaliering it on a handsome steed along the Montargis road was also carrying some of Cellamare's secret despatches about him. But Dubois' bloodhounds got on his track and ran him down at Nemours, though he just managed to pass on his papers

<sup>1</sup> Le Blanc, the Secretary of State, in the presence of the Abbé Dubois and the Maréchal de Bezons, asked Cellamare if he acknowledged the authorship of a letter which was put before him. “ Yes,” replied the Ambassador. “ Then I arrest you in the King's name,” said Le Blanc, and had him driven back to the Embassy in his own carriage.

in time to the Chevalier du Ménéil, another accomplice. Brigault was brought back to Paris and put under lock and key. The discovery of the plot did not greatly disturb the Regent. He thought lightly of the perils which his enemies had been strewing in his path. "They would not dare," he said with a toss of his head.<sup>1</sup> But his mother, less calm, was indignant about the traps that had been prepared for her son. "They say it's a mere nothing to set the whole Kingdom in revolt and to stir up all the parliaments against the Regent; a mere nothing to set about trying to assassinate him!" Then she turned her wrath on the Abbé Brigault. "He has had a hand in all the pamphlets and all the plots against the Regent. They have rough copies of all the wicked Spanish letters written by Malézieu at the bedside of the Duchesse du Maine, and corrected either by the Duchess herself or by Cardinal de Polignac." Much more than that, in Malézieu's *escritoire* they had discovered the draft of the famous letter from the King of Spain to Louis XV. which he thought had been stolen. He rushed at it and tore it in pieces, but Trudaine, an officer of police, managed to put it together again.

A letter from Cellamare to Alberoni bore witness to the fact that the du Maines were certainly the ringleaders of the conspiracy. There were passages in the message to the effect that the King of Spain had given money to the Duc du Maine to assist him to pay or to bribe the people he employed. Doubt was no longer possible; they were confronted with a case of high treason.

The letters intercepted on the 9th December came in very opportunely in furnishing Dubois with the necessary arguments "for persuading the Regency Council to take a decisive course of action, and for causing a revulsion in popular feeling, which up to then had been in favour of Spain."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.

<sup>2</sup> Baudrillart.

There was little talk of the conspiracy in the gazettes, and no great feeling was manifested in the provinces. In those days the post rarely served as a medium of news for private individuals. Abroad, however, suspicions began to be entertained regarding the intrigues of the Duchess, and epigrams fell thick and fast upon her. She was considered too much of a coquette for a woman of forty-two, too anxious to make herself appear young. Bad verses such as the following were written about her:—

Ce grand air, ce sourire charmant,  
Orné de badinage,  
Du Maine cet empressement  
Nous fait voir qu' à votre âge,  
Vous voulez donner de l'amour ;  
Mais qui pourrait en prendre,  
Serait un héros dans ce jour  
Plus brave qu' Alexandre.

All the time she was thus being gibbeted, the Queen of Sceaux tried to put as good a face as possible on the matter. She received with an air of affected indifference the numerous people who came to bring her tidings at her temporary abode in the Rue Saint-Honoré. She dared not avoid seeing all these people, and went on card-playing as usual. To avert suspicion she drew Mademoiselle de Launay apart to inquire if she had heard any special news.

"A gentleman has just given me a most important piece of information," was the reply. "The Spanish Ambassador's house is hemmed in by soldiers, and the whole neighbourhood is filled with troops; no one knows yet what it is all about." A moment later Madame du Maine heard the same thing in her salon, which was thronged with people. Every fresh arrival brought some additional details. The Duchess could not withdraw lest people should think she had something on her mind.

The arrest at Poitiers, the seizure of Porto-Carrero's papers completed her anxiety. Madame du Maine and her accomplices saw themselves "plunged into the abyss."<sup>1</sup>

Two days later, on the 10th December, still repressing her feelings and playing "biribi" as if nothing had happened, she heard that Brigault, her latest emissary, had been arrested, and that he had disclosed everybody's name in order to save his own head. "The great joke is," added her informant, a Monsieur de Châtillon, who was in charge of the bank, and who as a rule was a cold silent man, "The great joke is that they've arrested an Abbé Bri— Bri— something or other, who has made a clean breast of the whole business. Some people will find themselves in a pretty pickle." The company began to titter; they were a frivolous, mirth-loving set, and laughter was contagious among them. "Yes," said the Duchess, growing pale beneath her rouge, "it is really a capital joke." "Oh, it's enough to make one die with laughter," went on the vexatious creature, "fancy them thinking the whole thing a deadly secret. One of them, anyhow, has told more than he was asked, and has given away everybody's name."

This finishing touch to what might have been a scene from Molière, gave the Duchess a terrible shock. It was the last thing she expected to hear, because on the strength of a note she had received from Laval, she thought the Abbé had managed to escape with all his papers. This time the thing was hopeless—all was lost! Haughty and passionate, she continued to dissemble for a few days longer, answering as best she might the meek reproaches of the Duc du Maine. From his whispered upbraidings of "It's all your fault," she sought to fortify herself by leaning on Mademoiselle de Launay, who never wavered in her loyalty.

Already greatly perturbed at the arrest of Cellamare

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Madame de Staal."

and Brigault, the Duchess's apprehensions were not diminished by the manifold warnings she received of the danger of her position, or by the news of certain ominous orders that had been given to the guards and the two companies of musketeers.<sup>1</sup> Her excitement had now given place to despondency. In her own circle the hope was still entertained that, in view of her exalted rank, she would merely be consigned, with a suitable retinue, to one of the royal residences. Sometimes she clutches at the hope that all may yet be well with her plot and that she may, after all, be able to carry the matter through; sometimes, comprehending her situation in all its grave reality, she would merely occupy her mind with devising plans to make her coming incarceration more tolerable. If only she could avert the blow by means of an interview with her brother-in-law! Putting this idea forthwith into execution, she proceeds to the Palais Royal, where Philippe accords her a rather chilling reception. She delivers herself of fine theatrical phrases as though she were still play-acting, while he reproaches her with having openly declared that she would know no rest till she had made his life a burden to him; whereto she answers carelessly, "Oh, people often say things in a temper which they haven't the smallest intention of carrying out." "How," she went on eagerly, "how can you suppose that the reply to Fitz-Morris was my work? I do not descend to things of that nature; Cardinal de Polignac has far too important matters on hand to allow him to dally with such trivialities, while Monsieur de Malézieu is too much of a philosopher to think of anything but his science. As for me, my sole task is to bring up my children as they should be brought up, and, in this manner, to show myself worthy of being a princess of the blood, an honour of which I have been unjustly deprived."

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.

Thus in a few words the princess managed to put in a plea for the three people she loved best in the world—herself, her Cardinal and her Secretary.

“I have every reason to believe that the pamphlets were manufactured in your house,” replied the Regent coldly, “because people who were in your employ and saw them being written have borne witness to that effect. Besides, it is not a question of believing or disbelieving, but of fact.” With that he turned his back on the fair petitioner. This, however, did not prevent Madame du Maine from boasting of the vigour of her protest. She returned to Sceaux, and finding that her sons had been forbidden to join her there, and that her daughter had been packed off to the Convent at Maubuisson, she urged her husband to flee, adding that she herself would be found in the breach. The Duc du Maine declined to escape, “for,” said he, “since neither of us has written anything in our own hand, they can prove nothing against us. To run away would be to avow our guilt.”

On Christmas Day, after some discussion as to the indemnity that should be demanded from the King of Spain, the Regent told the Duc de Bourbon in the strictest confidence that the Duc and Duchesse du Maine were accomplices of Prince de Cellamare, and that there were proofs in writing. To his certain knowledge, he said, the Duc du Maine had intended to bring the King to Parliament to have his minority declared at an end, and so abolish the Regency. Marshal de Villars said that he did not credit the Duc du Maine with sufficient determination to put such a plan into execution. Philippe d'Orléans was by no means ignorant of the detestation in which the Duc de Bourbon held his aunt and uncle. When, therefore, he asked his opinion concerning the treatment that should be meted out to them, he knew in advance the reply he would receive.

Saint-Simon records with malicious zest the Duc de Bourbon's declaration that both husband and wife ought to be arrested and kept under lock and key. "But," exclaimed Philippe d'Orléans with a gesture of despair, "du Maine is my brother-in-law." "Does that give him the right to throttle you, as he has tried to do all his life?" answered Saint-Simon. The author of the "Mémoires" permits us to gather that he would have welcomed the capital sentence for Monsieur du Maine. "If they had cut off his head as Richelieu would have done, it would have been a good stroke of fortune for Saint-Simon," says the Marquis d'Argenson,<sup>1</sup> "for he would then have succeeded to the Grand Mastership of Artillery, and have satisfied at a stroke his revenge and his ambition." Nevertheless, in the conclave at the Palais Royal he only dared to propose imprisonment.

The choice of a prison had now to be considered. If they selected the Bastille or Vincennes, there was the risk of trouble with the Duc du Maine party in the capital. Doullens, or as it was then called, Dourlens, in Picardy, was suggested for the Duc du Maine. There was a man there who could be trusted to keep an eye on the prisoner, for Charost, the Governor of Calais, had charge of Doullens also.

As for Madame du Maine, Saint-Simon roundly declared that, seeing she was a princess of the blood, she ought to pay the penalty with her life, or at least be condemned to perpetual imprisonment. He pointed out that in her case the selection of a prison offered considerable difficulties in view of her sex, her temper, and her way of setting everyone and everything about her in an uproar. Her husband, on the other hand, would fall into the deepest dejection and remain perfectly quiet in his prison, being in everlasting terror of the scaffold.

As the discussion proceeded, the Duc d'Orléans, with

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires du Marquis d'Argenson," 1825 edition, p. 178.

a smile, asked the Duc de Bourbon to help him out of the difficulty, and, somehow, mention was made of the Château de Dijon. It was all very well, said Bourbon, to put Madame du Maine out of mischief's way, but to make him his own aunt's gaoler, surely they could hardly expect him to agree to that! However, he did not look very serious about the matter, and the Regent was encouraged to insist. Thus in the end Dijon was decided upon. It was considered that in the heart of the territory controlled by the Duc de Bourbon, and in a place where his word was law, Madame du Maine would be more utterly without resource and less likely to attempt flight than anywhere else in the Kingdom.

Saint-Simon had his grip upon his prey. His vindictiveness, as he himself avowed, was to some extent innate, and he could not conceal how merry a jest he thought it that this woman who had bragged with so much assurance that she was going to overthrow the government and set the country in a blaze for the sake of retaining privileges so irregularly acquired, should now be raging like a caged panther within the four walls of a prison, in the power of the Duc de Bourbon.

The 26th and 27th December were spent in giving secret orders. When the du Maines learned of Cellamare's forced journey to Blois, of the seizure and scrutiny of his papers, and of all the arrests that had been effected, they lost no time in putting their own papers in a place of safety. This done, their apprehensions diminished, and they felt more prepared for eventualities.

On the 28th December the Duc du Maine went from Sceaux to see the Duchesse d'Orléans at the Palais Royal, and left again after an hour's conversation. Husband and wife might have both been arrested at the same time as Cellamare, and Dubois might have pounced on all their correspondence. Saint-Simon, however, tells us that "it did not suit his purpose to serve the State



so well." Meanwhile, Monsieur du Maine with his secretary remained at Sceaux, and Madame du Maine at Paris. The 29th December, about ten o'clock in the morning, La Billarderie, Lieutenant of the King's Body-guard, stationed his men round the Château de Sceaux and proceeded himself to apprehend the Prince as he left his chapel after Mass. With very respectful demeanour, the officer requested him not to return to the house, but immediately to enter a six-horse carriage which was in attendance, together with a numerous escort of musketeers and light horse belonging to the King's household. Only a few domestics were at hand at the time, and the Duc du Maine, with the terror of death in his countenance, offered no resistance. "I have been expecting this compliment for some days," was his sole remark as he stepped into the carriage. Monsieur Trudaine, the City Provost and a member of the Conseil d'État, put his seal on all the papers. La Billarderie took his seat in the carriage beside the Prince, while the box-seat was occupied by an adjutant of the guards and a corporal of musketeers named Favancourt, who was to act as the prisoner's gaoler at Doullens. "What is that man doing here?" exclaimed the Duc, growing pale, and when they reached the end of the castle avenue, he protested against his numerous escort.

They drove along in a silence that was broken only by the Duc's protestations of innocence. "It is all a mistake," he said, "but it will soon be put right, and I shall return to my own residence, for I am no less attached to the Duc d'Orléans than to the King." All this, Saint-Simon tells us, was said in a choking voice and with numberless sighs. Then there would be signs of the cross and low mutterings, as though he were saying his prayers, and bobbings of the head at every church or wayside cross they happened to pass. He looked wild and distraught, like a raw recruit marching forth to death.

Perchance he was thinking of Monmouth, that other royal bastard who fell beneath the headsman's axe. He took his meals with his warders in the carriage, but supped alone every evening at an inn. Great were the precautions taken by his custodians at night. It was not until the following day that he learnt he was bound for Doullens.<sup>1</sup> There, with a couple of valets to wait on him, he was kept under continual observation. On his arrival he wrote to his sister as follows :—

Prison is not where they ought to put me. I ought to be stripped and put in a strait-jacket for allowing myself to be led like this by my wife.

After a few days in prison he sent the following message to Madame de Langeron :—

I am now enjoying a repose which I look upon as a benison from God. I am happy in being no longer exposed to the scorn of my own family, and I console myself in my isolation with the reflection that my sons are not sharing my incarceration.

The prisoner accentuated the hardships of his captivity by various self-imposed austerities, "valuing," says a contemporary, "no liberty save that stoic freedom of mind which may be enjoyed by a man even when in fetters." His warders were edified at the Christian fortitude he displayed in his wretched lodging, for the Château de Doullens was a mouldering ruin, and his rooms were so full of cracks and crevices that it was no easy matter to keep the candles alight.

The arrest of Madame du Maine was a very different affair, and the event did not fail to make a great stir. The Duchess had turned her house in the Rue Saint-Honoré into a sort of refuge for all those adherents to whom her timorous husband was afraid to attach himself. The Regent and Dubois thought it would be rather

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Duclos, de la Palatine, de Mme. de Staal."

amusing to have her arrested there, while the plan would, they considered, have the double effect of lowering her in the eyes of the public and dethroning her in her husband's heart.

On the night of the day the Duc had been carried off to Doullens (29th December), an unknown lady came secretly from the Marquis de Lambert and roused Mademoiselle de Launay to inform her that her mistress's arrest was imminent. The Princess, who suffered none of her friends to depart, whispered the news in the ear of the Abbé de Vaubrun, and a sort of armed watch was kept which passed off merrily enough.<sup>1</sup> Mademoiselle de Launay, who desired to read to her mistress to beguile the time, produced a work of Machiavelli's, and opened it at the chapter on Conspiracies. "Put that away at once," said the Duchess with a laugh, "it would be a most damning piece of evidence against us." In order to while away the hours till daybreak, Madame du Maine set herself to write a memorial to her mother, in which she demanded that her case should be tried immediately after her arrest, being sure, she said, that a judicial inquiry into her conduct would compel the Regent to restore her to liberty.

The following morning at ten o'clock, just as her mistress had fallen asleep worn out with writing and "biribi," Mademoiselle de Launay retired to rest. Scarcely had she lain down when there came a knock at the door, and a summons in the King's name.<sup>2</sup> They took her away to the Bastille. The house was already surrounded and filled with guards and musketeers. The Duc de Béthune, who was in command of the guards of the district, and La Billarderie, a younger brother of the one who had arrested the Duc du Maine, were the bearers of a warrant authorising them to seize the Duchess's person. Downstairs under the windows were

<sup>1</sup> "Madame de Staal."

<sup>2</sup> 29th December 1718.

drawn up two companies of musketeers under arms. The Duc d'Ancenis (who had recently inherited the Captaincy of the Bodyguard from his father the Duc de Charost) made his way into Madame du Maine's apartment. Only the night before he had been sitting at supper with her. When she saw him standing at the foot of her bed, she spoke out mighty harshly, saying, "Mon Dieu, what have I done that you should come and wake me at this early hour! . . . why am I being arrested?"

She is told that all is discovered, that the prisoners have divulged everything. This gives her a shock that nearly takes her breath away, but she rises and begins to dress with all speed. "It is I, a grand-daughter of the Great Condé, who stands before you. I know that I am still worthy of him, that I have not degenerated. Beaten? I? Never! Oh, why am I not a man?" Then proceeding more softly she says, "Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans thinks that I hate him. If he would but follow my counsels, I could give him better advice than anyone."

All round the house were soldiers of the bodyguard under the command of a lieutenant and adjutant on foot. Madame du Maine was anxious to take her cash-box, but the Duc d'Ancenis objected. At all events, she said, he must let her have her jewels, which she could on no account do without. She was allowed to have them after a lot of wrangling. She delayed her departure as long as she could, till at last, Ancenis, who had been doing his best to expedite matters, took her by the hand, saying politely but firmly, "Madame, the hour is come." At her door were two hired carriages drawn by six horses, the sight of which nearly suffocated her. "Hackney coaches for a Condé! Faugh!" Still, there was nothing for it; she had to make up her mind and get in.

In the other carriage they packed the luggage and two *femmes de chambre* whom the Duchess had been permitted

to choose as her attendants. The drivers whipped up their horses and away they went. Avoiding the main streets, they crossed the Rue Saint-Antoine and the Ile Notre-Dame, and, proceeding thence along the ramparts, left Paris by the Porte Saint-Bernard. The exodus was quite unnoticed, a circumstance at which Madame du Maine was unable to conceal her surprise and mortification.<sup>1</sup> However, not a tear did she shed. By fits and starts she broke out into diatribes against the violence with which she was being used. Invective and literary orations were poured forth pell-mell in one continuous stream. Then, from calling down curses, she relapsed into an attitude of dignified melancholy, and at last, in gentler mood, fell to coaxing and wheedling her warder into granting her some little favours which she desired. For the greater part of the journey her demeanour was that of a dethroned queen faring forth to exile.

Meanwhile the Prince des Dombes and the Comte d'Eu were arrested and lodged for the time being at the Hôtel de Toulouse, their uncle making himself answerable for their safe custody. They were subsequently banished to Gien, where they were to reside under the tutelage of a gentleman of trust. Mademoiselle du Maine was reinstalled at Maubuisson.

Dubois' agents ruthlessly overhauled the Duchess's papers with the idea of discovering the truth, or, if it came to the push, of pretending to discover a slander. The slanderous matter was eagerly pounced upon by her ill-wishers.

Notwithstanding my melancholy, writes Madame la Palatine,<sup>2</sup> my son has sent me into fits of laughter over what he tells me they have found in some letters written by the Duchesse du Maine to Cardinal de Polignac, which were seized at the

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Simon.

<sup>2</sup> "Correspondance de Madame," p. 318.

latter's house. In one of them this upright and virtuous creature writes: "We are off to the country to-morrow. I will arrange for your room to be next to mine. Try to do as well as last time, and we shall be in the seventh heaven.

The idle invention perhaps of some mischievous enemy, this traitorous letter does not strike the impartial historian as a convincing proof of the Princess's guilt. The missive and the accusation it contains have for us, therefore, merely a documentary interest.

## CHAPTER XII

The Duchesse du Maine removed to Dijon—History of the Château de Dijon—The life of the Duchess in prison—La Billarderie and Valibouze—Desgranges, Governor of the Château—M. d’Affry’s intervention—The Duchess transferred to Chalon (May 1719)—The Abbé Desplanes keeps watch on her—The Marquis de Charost endeavours to establish communications with her—Rumours from without.

**A**S might have been anticipated in the case of so tempestuous and despotic a personage, the journey of the Duchesse du Maine from Paris to Dijon was not unenlivened by incident. At Essonnes, where they halted for the night, the Duc d’Ancenis took leave of his prisoner in order to give an account of his mission to the Regent, leaving her in the hands of the officer of the guards. “Whither am I being taken?” she cried. “To Fontainebleau,” they told her, not wishing as yet to reveal her destination. All along the route the Duchess never ceased to complain of the carriage and the indignity of her treatment. The berlin, which was a very ramshackle affair, nearly broke down on the road, and to complete the journey the minister was obliged to ask the Bishop of Sens, Monseigneur Bouthillier de Chavigny, for the loan of his coach. “I am well aware,” wrote the former, “that this request is somewhat out of the ordinary, but at the same time I feel sure that, in view of the Princess’s distressing situation, you will be only too happy to be the means of procuring her a comfort of this nature.”<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> “Le Blanc to the Archbishop of Sens,” 30th December 1718.

At Auxerre the Duchess was obliged to cry halt on account of indisposition. The delay was sanctioned.

If, ran the instructions given by Le Blanc, the health of Madame la Duchesse should give way to such an extent as to make the carriage unbearable for her, you would have to make up your mind to come to a standstill wherever you might chance to be. His Royal Highness gives you full permission to do so, and again enjoins upon you the necessity of showing your charge every consideration due to her rank, while never neglecting the precautions necessary for her safe custody and for preventing her from holding any communication with her friends.

These concessions greatly annoyed Saint-Simon, who reproached the Regent for exhibiting "his usual easy-going disposition. On the journey," he said, "Madame du Maine might have been taken for a Daughter of France."

The most highly charged adjectives, culled from the romances with which her head was crammed, "were not strong enough, in her view, to give adequate force to the justice of her complaints."<sup>1</sup> At Auxerre she had to change coaches. During the following stage she set a truce to her lamentations, but they broke our afresh on entering Burgundy. Then and then only did it dawn upon her that it was to Dijon they were taking her. Suspecting that the Duc de Bourbon himself had requested the Regent to have her imprisoned in the territory under his governance, she jumped to the conclusion that she was at her nephew's mercy, and regarded it as a deadly affront that she should be imprisoned in his capital. She kept striking theatrical attitudes and volubly declaiming tragic tirades excerpted from her repertory at Sceaux, La Billarderie gazing at her in speechless amazement.

On the 4th January 1719, a few days after her daughter's arrest, Madame la Princesse had hastened to the Duc d'Orléans to beg him to relax some of the regulations

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Madame de Staal."



with respect to her daughter's journey and her existence in prison, on the grounds that she was suffering a good deal of indisposition on the route. She requested that she might be attended by a surgeon, and that an upholsterer should be employed to get her room ready at each halting-place. Philippe promised nothing, and granted everything.

At last, after her long journey over rough ice-covered roads, the fortress within whose frowning walls she was to pass as a prisoner rose up before her eyes. Like Io, she cried aloud :

Aux fureurs de Junon, Jupiter m'abandonne !

The Château de Dijon no longer exists. Alike to the archæologist and the historian, it is a matter for regret that only by tradition is it possible to reconstruct the outlines of those ancient walls which served the dual purpose of a feudal stronghold and a Burgundian prison. Sieges they had known, and behind them had languished many a political prisoner.

The edifice consisted of a massive group of masonry, standing four square with a tower at each angle, all of which were identical in form. These towers, which bore respectively the names of Guillaume, Saint-Bénigne, Notre-Dame and Saint-Martin, were protected by two horse-shoe defences, of which the larger faced northwards towards the open country. Wide ditches, now filled up, surrounded the building. This fortress had been built by command of Louis XI. at the time of the Burgundian union, and had been bombarded and taken by Henri IV. after Fontaine-Française. In the days of the Fronde it had been besieged by the Duc d'Épernon, after which it had been converted into a state prison, receiving as its first inmates in 1659 two Huguenots, Antoine de Presle and his wife. Since that date no prisoner of State had been confined within its walls.

The Duchesse du Maine was shut up there on the 13th January 1719. A simple lodging had been hastily fitted up for her in the wing facing the city. Great was the surprise of the people of Dijon when they learned that the mysterious traveller who had entered the stronghold under so heavy an escort was a woman and own aunt to the Governor of Burgundy himself. Thus it came about that the Duchesse du Maine found herself a prisoner in the fortress which her grandfather, the illustrious Condé, had caused to be besieged during the Fronde. In 1650 her place of detention would have been Vincennes, Marcoussis or le Havre : in 1719 the prisons had changed, but the imprisonment had been brought about by the same spirit of revolt.

Stringent orders had been forwarded by Le Blanc, the Secretary of State for War, to Monsieur La Briffe, the Intendant of Burgundy, and also to the Commandant of the Château de Dijon, with regard to the treatment of the Duchess. She was not to be permitted to hold communication with anybody, whether in writing or by word of mouth. The principal suite in the Château was to be suitably furnished and placed at her disposal in order that she might be comfortably lodged. At the same time, none of the customary precautions to ensure her safe custody were to be dispensed with. An engineer was to carry out an inspection in order to decide what would be necessary to give effect to His Majesty's wishes, and was to see that the work was carried on night and day without a break.<sup>1</sup> Money would be advanced to cover the expense. A list of additional repairs of a less urgent nature, but such as might be necessitated by the prisoner's rank,<sup>2</sup> was to be prepared.

<sup>1</sup> Ravaisson, "Archives de la Bastille," vol. xiii., p. 222. Le Blanc to La Briffe, Intendant of Burgundy, 29th December 1718.

<sup>2</sup> Le Blanc to Desgranges, 30th December 1718. All the minutes of the letters published by Ravaisson are to be found in the archives of the War Office.

Two letters addressed respectively to M. Desgranges, commandant of the fortress, and to M. de Bierre, treasurer of the Burgundian States, contained instructions regarding the furniture to be placed at the Duchess's disposal. She was to be supplied with the necessary linen and plate. Twelve officers from the Hôtel des Invalides were sent to reinforce the garrison in order that it might be possible, without inconvenience, to discharge the necessary duties with due regularity. Three of the Duchess's footmen requested permission to accompany their mistress, and though it had been thought undesirable to deprive her of their services during the journey, they were not permitted to enter the Château. As the hearing of Mass might afford the prisoner some means of communicating with her friends, Monsieur de la Briffe was commanded to make arrangements with the King's engineer for the erection of a gallery within the Chapel to permit of the Duchess and her two women being present at Divine Service without holding converse with anyone.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Ravaisson, vol. xiii., p. 222, Le Blanc to La Briffe, Intendant of Burgundy, 29th December 1718. "The King, having had no alternative but to order the arrest of Madame la Duchesse du Maine and her removal to the Château de Dijon, where she is to remain until further orders, holding no communication with any person, whether by letter or by word of mouth, the first and most urgent necessity is to prepare the principal suite of apartments in the Château for her reception by carrying out without an instant's loss all such repairs as may be necessary for her comfort, without, however, dispensing with any of those precautions that may be required in order to prevent her from escaping. You will therefore be pleased, so soon as this letter is delivered by the messenger whom I am despatching to you, to repair to the Château with the principal engineer within reach, with the view of determining what work will be necessary in order to give effect to His Majesty's wishes, and to see that the same is carried on night and day without a break. You will further be so good as to advance whatever sum may be required to meet the expenditure, and I will make it my care, on receipt of your first advice, duly to reimburse you. You will also draw up in conjunction with the said engineer a list of other desirable but less pressing renovations, together with an estimate of their cost, in order that I may place you in possession of the funds necessary for this further outlay.

On the 16th January a conveyance left Paris with a load of books, furniture and wearing apparel consigned to the Duchesse du Maine, but accompanied by orders to Monsieur Desgranges that the boxes were to be examined on arrival, and the books subjected to a careful search, to make sure that no suspicious papers lay concealed therein.

Doctor Falconnet and Landumier, a dentist, were sent to Dijon to give their services to the prisoner. They lodged at the Château, and were cut off from all communication with the outer world. Mademoiselle Desforges, a lady-in-waiting, and Mademoiselle Quelon, a lady of the wardrobe, came to assist the two other ladies-in-waiting. They were both searched on their arrival. A letter from Madame la Princesse was delivered to the Duchess, who was given ink and paper for a reply, which, however, she was obliged to write in the presence of the Commandant and hand over to him unsealed. The paper and ink were then at once removed. The guards of the Château were paid off and sent back in detachments to their quarters. The Duchess's three footmen, who had accompanied her and had been compelled to bid her adieu at Dijon, were sent to the Bastille as soon as ever they reached Sceaux. A confessor was appointed for the Duchess in accordance with her request. Great circumspection was observed in making the selection. "It is needless to say," ran the instructions, "that it would be undesirable to choose anyone capable of carrying on an intrigue." Madame du Maine, finding her apartments inconvenient, the work of making ready the suite intended for her was pushed on with the utmost diligence. The fireplace was modernised; funds were supplied for laundry expenses, paste, powder, pomades and other articles. The most important thing was to see that the prisoner should not get together a sufficient sum of money to enable her to tamper with the soldiers

of the guard. She was allowed to read the *Gazette de Paris*, but not that of Holland, on the pretence that it did not come to Dijon. Her own medical man, Dr Séron, who was obliged to come and relieve Falconnet, was not allowed to have paper or ink. He was not permitted to go outside the Château, in which he had his own room, and from which he could only communicate with the soldiers of the guard or the people on duty. Similar precautions were observed in the case of the dentist, who, in the event of the Duchess retaining him for several days, was also to be quartered in the Château. His duties performed, he was immediately dismissed. The Regent accorded his permission to the Duchess to correspond with her mother whenever she might desire to do so, but with the stipulation that the letters should be written in the presence of the governor, and that their contents should be communicated to His Royal Highness through the minister. The correspondence of the ladies-in-waiting was also subject to similar restrictions. In the event of their being taken ill and desiring medical attention, a surgeon was to be called in, but he was to be a man who could be relied upon, and his conduct at the castle was to be subjected to the closest scrutiny.<sup>1</sup>

The prisoner was to be allowed to take her meals in the little garden-room, but they were to be served with the same attention to order as would be observed in the chief apartments of the Château. M. de Valibouze, a captain in the royal regiment, was appointed to govern the castle in the absence of Desgranges. In the course of his first interview with the Duchess, she plied him with innumerable questions, and the minister, in congratulating him on the discretion which had characterised his replies, added, "Let her have every convenience that the circumstances will allow, although,

<sup>1</sup> "Le Blanc to Valibouze," 22nd February 1719.

do what one will, she will never be satisfied so long as she remains in the Château de Dijon."

La Billarderie's mission was over. To him and to the Duc d'Anceis the Regent expressed his satisfaction at the manner in which they had acquitted themselves of their task. "With all my heart," wrote the minister, "I sympathise with you over your protracted and disagreeable journey. I am fully assured that it was through no fault of yours that it was not compassed more rapidly. It was necessary to square politeness with punctuality, and in that none could have achieved greater success than you have done."

The question of the jewels was negotiated without difficulty, the Duchess being allowed to retain some of them, "a diamond clasp, a pearl necklace and two portraits which she had desired to keep." La Billarderie was instructed to hand over the coffer containing the rest of the diamonds to Madame la Princesse as soon as he returned to Paris.<sup>1</sup> But what endless precautions!

You will be so good as to avoid letting her know that you have a letter for her from the Duchesse du Maine, because if it should contain any undesirable matter, His Royal Highness would possibly not allow it to be delivered. You could not avoid remaining a day or two at Dijon to have the carriages seen to. His Royal Highness is agreeable to your arranging your return as you may deem expedient.

These early regulations were pretty rigorous. Not only is Dubois' firmness visible therein, but also the Duc de Bourbon's hostility, although the latter did his utmost to keep himself in the background. Saint-Simon considered that a great deal too much leniency was shown to the Duchess. "All these attentions," he remarks, "were utterly thrown away. Monsieur d'Orléans must have known it well enough; it was merely his

<sup>1</sup> They were altogether worth a million.

lamentable weakness." We are not disposed to endorse the views of this ferocious critic.

There, then, she was in prison, even as her grandfather had been at Vincennes. Who would have believed it possible? With a tendency that was natural to her, she fell from a state of exultation into a condition of despondency, affecting to regard all and everyone about her in this melancholy abode with a disdainful indifference. Before long she fell ill, or pretended to fall ill, and then, almost before she had given herself time to recover, she began playing cards from morning till night. "When play ceases," says the Regent's mother, "her wrath returns, and her lash falls on husband, children, servants and everyone, and the staff of the castle are at their wits' end. Her violence is terrible. At Dijon, Orlando Furioso is her constant rôle." Being under her nephew's control, having him for her gaoler, as it were, that was what galled her.

Desgranges, the King's lieutenant, who was heart and soul for the Duc de Bourbon, kept a vigilant eye on her and her women. Without, her cause was beginning to excite attention. Madame la Princesse, yielding to her entreaties, went to beg Madame to obtain the government's permission to send to Dijon the remainder of her household at Sceaux, her ladies-in-waiting, her other femmes-de-chambre, her footman and her *barber*. The German frau simply laughed at such demands. All the same, with or without her intervention, the severity of the prisoner's treatment was gradually relaxed. Madame de Chambonas was sent to her, together with one of her ladies-in-waiting, her doctor and three servants. "This was a great comfort for the Princess," says Dangeau, "for she was frequently very indisposed, and had always been accustomed to have crowds of people about her." The concession did not have the effect of increasing her courage to any extent. She frequently became hysterical,

and her mind would occasionally wander. She used to call loudly for her mother to be brought to her, and sent her letters containing accusations against the Duc du Maine.

She anathematised her temporary quarters, her smoky chimney, her lack of furniture. "If," wrote Le Blanc, "Madame la Duchesse would be so good as to pass two days in the apartments which have been made ready for her, the opportunity would be taken to finish the work." But she refused to put herself out even to avoid the smoke. She preferred to go on anathematising. Her bedroom was filled with Parisian furniture, and she was allowed all her articles of toilet, her pastes, powders and pomades, of which she made unstinted use. Nothing satisfied her. "You must not be surprised at all the complaints of Madame du Maine," repeats the Minister in his letter, "she should be forgiven, considering the position in which she is placed. If she persists in her demand to be alone in her room when making her confession, His Royal Highness thinks it well that you should grant her request."

To Madame la Princesse, who begged to be allowed to have her daughter back with her at Anet, the Regent made reply: "If she had only conspired against my life, I would have forgiven her, but she has failed in her duty to the State. I am compelled to leave her in prison."

But her friends began to consider how they might devise means for her escape. One day a certain Monsieur d'Affry, a colonel in the Swiss guards and a devoted friend of the Duc du Maine, happened to be passing through Dijon, where he heard the sensational news of the Duchess's imprisonment. Some of her adherents contrived to interest him in her lot, and an unsigned communication was handed to him stating that it was known that he desired to see the prisoner, and that he might easily do so without the slightest danger. He was



told that at the corner of a certain street in the town he would find one of the Duchess's men wearing the du Maine livery, and that the latter had received orders to exchange clothes with him, by which means he would be able to make his way into the castle.<sup>1</sup>

But Monsieur d'Affry was afraid of the governor, who, he thought, would be bound to know of the servant's going out, of the delivery of the note and of the clandestine entry. Prudence counselled him to hurry on to Paris without availing himself of the offer. The only result of the adventure was that the Regent got to hear of the matter, and removed d'Affry's name from the list of officers eligible for promotion. This attempt having miscarried, the Duchess turned her attention to the government, and henceforth had but one idea, and that was to obtain forgiveness. To Philippe d'Orléans she dispatched a message with the object of explaining her conduct, and making him the *amende honorable*.

I swear to you before God, Monsieur, that at the very beginning of my misfortune I had made up my mind to make my confession to you, and to place myself unreservedly in your hands. Thinking I might rely on your kindness and generosity, I was desirous of writing you as soon as I reached Dijon, but Monsieur Desgranges would not permit it. . . . I flatter myself that I am overlooking no essential point. Still, the matter is infinitely involved, and if any circumstance of importance does happen to escape me, I beg, Monsieur, that you will not ascribe it to any lack of willingness or sincerity, but to a lapse of memory, and to depression resulting from my prolonged suffering.

The letter continues in this strain of verbose humility ; a manner little in keeping with the customary fanfarronnades of this haughty princess, who appends to her lengthy statement the proud signature " Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon." She offers no clear defence,

<sup>1</sup> " Mémoires du duc de Luynes."

no feasible explanation of her misdeeds, and her freedom was not to be gained at that price. After she had spent five months at Dijon, suffering from a host of ailments whose existence she had never so much as dreamt of before her imprisonment, she beseeched her mother to procure her a change, declaring that "the hardships and unhealthy conditions of her prison life had undermined her health, and that she was in danger of losing her life."<sup>1</sup> Her hope was to get nearer Paris. But alas, the government would only allow her to choose between the Castle of Dijon and the fortress of Chalon sur Saône!

La Billarderie was again told off to act as escort to the Duchess, and left Paris with the equipage that was to convey her from Dijon to Chalon. Madame du Maine made objections to the furniture, in order that she might be allowed to have her own. Nevertheless, they took whatever things were necessary for her use to Chalon, it being understood that they could be laid aside on her arrival if she would not condescend to accept them. The Regent appointed a half-pay colonel named Désangles to be governor of the fortress of Chalon during the Duchess's stay there. He was "a man of real worth."<sup>2</sup>

It was early in May 1719 that La Billarderie came to Dijon with a detachment of the body-guard to accompany her to her new residence. The desire to see what benefit she might gain from exchanging one painful situation for another, as well as the occasion it would afford her of seeing once again the loyal men that would ride beside her coach, brought Madame du Maine to undertake this second journey with a fairly good grace.

<sup>1</sup> "Madame la Princesse urgently requested my son to allow Madame du Maine to leave Dijon, alleging that the climate was unhealthy for her." ("Correspondance de Madame.")

<sup>2</sup> In a letter to Désangles, Le Blanc wrote: "You should not permit what the Duchess may say to you to deflect you from carrying out the orders you have received. Allowance must be made for one weary of her prison."

But no sooner did she arrive at Chalon than she declared her great mortification at being shut up in the fortress, as at Dijon, instead of being merely lodged at some private residence in the town. La Billarderie was lavish in his attentions, and procured her a calèche in which to take her drives. His services were subsequently rewarded by a pension of a thousand écus. The new quarters proved just as unhealthy as the old, but the regulations were somewhat less stringent.

At Chalon Madame du Maine went on groaning and fretting as at Dijon. "Ah!" she ironically exclaimed, "let Monsieur d'Orléans judge of my pains from my pleasures!" Her pleasures consisted in training a young ass in the grass courtyard of the citadel, in memory of which Voltaire subsequently addressed the following distich to the Queen of Sceaux:—

Dans ces murs malheureux, votre voix enchantée  
Ne put jamais charmer qu'un âne et les échos.

Tidings of the outer world again reached the prisoner's ears through secret channels, but they only served to renew her torment. She could not contain herself when they told her about the trial of her beloved secretary Malézieu, of his condemnation and imprisonment in the Conciergerie, and of his exile to the Iles Sainte-Marguerite. "News, for which those in prison hunger so, is really poison for them," observes Madame de Staal acutely. "They are happiest when no echo of what is going on in the world reaches their ears." Albeit, at Chalon, just as at Dijon, the unhappy plight of the illustrious captive awakened great compassion. As daughter-in-law to the great King and grand-daughter of one of the nation's heroes, she did not cease to be present to men's eyes, hidden though she was behind the bolts and bars of a prison. However, the commandant of the fort of Chalon considered that her resisting power had declined.

"She seems to have fallen into a state of despair," he wrote.<sup>1</sup> "She weeps bitterly and protests her innocence in the strongest and most solemn terms, adding that she knows perfectly well that she has got to die here, and that her foes are only awaiting her death in order to accuse her with impunity and justify their present conduct towards her, but that before her death she will charge her confessor to proclaim to all France that she dies innocent of all that she has been accused of, that she would swear it by the Host, etc."

She was most treacherously spied upon by an old almoner, the Abbé Desplanes, who wept with her and showered consolations upon her to persuade her to confide in him, immediately afterwards betaking himself to the authorities to give an account of her slightest words and gestures. Her prostration was so great that it was feared she would succumb. The Abbé de Maulevrier and Monsieur de Langeron had even sent word to Madame la Princesse that her daughter was at death's door; whereat the mother hurries with all speed to Chalon, where to her joyful surprise she finds her daughter up and about, even well enough to come out to meet her.

The wily Abbé Desplanes went on playing the informer, and was careful to ingratiate himself in high quarters.

Such, he wrote, to Le Blanc, has been my line of conduct, and I am glad to be able to give you an account of it myself; I do not know whether you will approve of it. I had become aware through some letters from Dunkerque that Madame la Princesse was endeavouring in a roundabout way to obtain safe and trustworthy information regarding her daughter through the Major commanding the fort. The correspondent, instead of applying to the Major, went like a sensible person straight to Monsieur Désangles, who will be certain to tell you about it. The latter is unaware that I know anything of the matter, but

<sup>1</sup> Désangles to Le Blanc, 30th June 1719.

I thought you would not object to my mentioning it to you. You perceive that I had good grounds for thus venturing to write to you.

The minister was naturally pleased with such a conscientious spy, and encouraged him to pursue his un-abbé like conduct.

Pray continue to call my attention to anything you may deem worthy of notice.<sup>1</sup> It is well that you should keep a sharp eye on Girard's proceedings. Try to find out whether he is carrying on some clandestine relations with the Capuchins on the pretext of conveying alms to them from Madame la Duchesse and her ladies. You seem to be better informed than anyone else concerning what goes on within the fortress, and I am confident you will soon know whether there is any ground for your suspicions.

In the course of the year 1719 the dual rôle which the complaisant abbé had undertaken assumed a more decisive character. Through the Comptroller-General he transmitted to the minister a secret letter in which he announced revelations of the highest importance. In such matters, he naively declared, he possessed a prophetic spirit which was rarely at fault. He had suspicions that a lady of the Court, the Marquise de Charost, had taken up an abode near Chalon in order to put herself into communication with the Duchesse du Maine. He confessed, this most worthy of abbés, that for a long time he had enjoyed the patronage of the lady in question, and that more than once he had felt ashamed of his suspicions concerning her. "However," he proceeded "having more regard for the truth than Plato himself, which is another way of saying that I am more devoted to His Royal Highness than to anyone, I do not hesitate to inform you of what I have just discovered, as I am convinced of your prudence, and venture to flatter myself that I enjoy the honour of your protection.

<sup>1</sup> Le Blanc to Desplanes, 20th June 1719.

I indulge the hope that you will extend your favour not only to me, but to those friends whose interests I am sacrificing in order to serve the King, for I am persuaded that if this lady is seeking to render the Princess a service, it will not be in a manner, on the face of it, incompatible with His Majesty's interests."

It is of course possible that Madame de Charost *did* endeavour to attract the Abbé Desplanes to her magnificent seat at Laborde, seven or eight leagues from Chalon, in order to interest him in the lot of his fair penitent, and possibly also to bring undue influence to bear upon him. It was from there that President Bouhier de Chavigny wrote to Major Desangles in the name of the châtelaine to inform the imprisoned princess that a friend was residing near at hand who would be eager to render Her Most Serene Highness any services she might be pleased to indicate, at the same time regretting that her warders were so implacable.

The commandant of the fort used to endeavour to glean from the Abbé Desplanes any news of a general character that he considered might be of interest to Madame du Maine. The Abbé, affecting great discretion, would urge the necessities of professional secrecy, or return evasive replies. He used to beguile the Duchess with false and honeyed speeches, and send her presents of apricots. She often indulged in very wordy discussions with him, and dealt with public matters in a much less "intransigent" spirit than she had been accustomed to exhibit before her fall. At this time we were openly at war with Spain. France had been forced to draw the sword against Philip V., for whose aggrandisement she had squandered so much blood and treasure. The French army had taken Fontarabia and San Sebastian. Several Spanish provinces had been driven to submit as a consequence of the successes won by our arms under the generalship of Berwick. These pieces of news fell

with shattering force on the heart of Madame du Maine, but, mastering her emotion, she merely remarked that she did not doubt the Spaniards would be compelled to sue for peace. Reflection and the desire to be restored to favour had greatly modified the Duchess's ideas, and politically she had "gone about ship." In her conversations with the commandant<sup>1</sup> she would criticise "the Spaniards' obstinacy" in continuing the war against the Regent. All her desires were for peace. She made strenuous endeavours to whitewash her friend Cardinal de Polignac, whose conduct, she averred, had been misrepresented by untruthful reports. She denied that he had been in league with the Spanish Ambassador; it was as President of the Academy of Science that the Cardinal went to visit Cellamare, and merely to seek his assistance "in reading a map of China." It was a campaign of calumny that had driven him away from the Palais Royal, and he "had ceased his usual attendance there, in spite of her advice, because his honour had grown suspect in His Royal Highness's eyes." She blamed his over-sensitiveness, and declared that she was convinced of his innocence. All these vain speeches failed to carry conviction to her hearers' minds, but they soothed her feelings and kept her thoughts employed.

In the summer of the year 1719 the Abbé Desplanes was informed that His Royal Highness, acceding to the incessant demands of the Duchess, and being anxious to mitigate the severity of her treatment, had given her permission to select a country house in the vicinity of Chalon, and to extend the area of her promenades. Désangles and La Billarderie, however, still had instructions to keep Madame du Maine under observation. Since this increase of freedom might possibly favour the renewal of prohibited relations, it was enjoined

<sup>1</sup> Désangles to Le Blanc, Chalon, 2nd August 1719.

upon her guardians that they must not relax their vigilance, and particularly that they must endeavour to fathom the object of the letters that passed between the Duchess and the Marquise de Charost. However, nothing prejudicial to the Duchess's interests came to light.



## CHAPTER XIII

The Duchess is sent to Savigny—The vale of Fontaine Froide—  
Further transfer to the Château de Champlay (September 1719)—  
Madame la Princesse at Champlay—They urge the Duchess to  
confess—Her statement—She is set at liberty (January 1720).

**T**HOUGH the Regent gained some reassurance regarding the Duchess's attitude from the burden of her conversation with her gaolers, he continued to have her strictly watched. "I do not think," wrote Le Blanc to La Billarderie, "that there is anything going on between Madame de Charost and the princess save a harmless exchange of compliments and good wishes. At the same time you would do well to keep an eye on events, and advise me if you notice anything that strikes you as conflicting with the intentions of His Royal Highness."

By dint of repeated applications, in which she made the most of the precarious state of her daughter's health, Madame la Princesse at last obtained a reduction of the sentence. Messieurs de Torpane and de La Billarderie were sent to Chalon to look for a house for her in the neighbourhood, the Regent having been pleased to grant her this semi-freedom. It meant that she was to exchange imprisonment for exile. She was permitted to select one of two residences. Her choice lighted upon Serrigny-lès-Beaune, but owing to the water which surrounded it, the site of the house did not seem sufficiently salubrious for one whose health, like the Duchess's, was already much impaired. Preference was given to the Château

de Savigny-sous-Beaune<sup>1</sup> near by, which was more favourably situated on a hill surrounded by vineyards and in close proximity to a wood. It belonged to Monsieur de Migieu, Presiding Justice of the Dijon Parliament.

On the 11th August 1719 Le Blanc instructed Monsieur de La Billarderie to approach the owner with the proposal that he should lend his house as a place of detention for the Duchesse du Maine. By the Regent's orders, a ministerial letter was forwarded to Monsieur de Migieu with the object of facilitating the negotiations. The furniture was to be removed from the château in order that no damage might be done to it, and the upholsterer of the Arsenal was to fit it up in accordance with Madame du Maine's wishes, at least, so far as his instructions would permit. The exile was to be free of Savigny, both château and park. The Manor was well worthy of forming an asylum for the misfortunes of so exalted a lady, not only by reason of its imposing exterior, but by the convenient nature of its internal arrangements. The estate had been made a marquisate in 1706, and the château itself was always known as the Donjon. It was flanked by four great towers, and had been built in the fourteenth century by Jean de Froloy, and dismantled in the fifteenth.

In it Madame du Maine passed about six months. When there, she was able further to increase the number of her domestics, and to have about her what she proudly called "the appurtenances of a princess." Her name has remained very popular in those parts.<sup>2</sup> Even now the vine-dressers, pointing from afar to the southern tower of the château, never forget to say to the stranger, "That is the Duchess's room," though generally without having any clear idea as to which particular duchess they mean. As a matter of fact, if we are to credit

<sup>1</sup> Le Blanc to Desplanes, 12th August 1719.

<sup>2</sup> Courtepée, "Histoire des ducs de Bourgogne."

local tradition, it was really in a room adjoining and not in the tower itself that Madame du Maine used to sleep. Her portrait may be seen there, and also a harpsichord over whose notes her fingers would languidly wander in the weary days of her solitude.

There exists at Savigny yet another souvenir, still fresh and full of life as ever, of the exile's sojourn there in 1719. This corner of Burgundy is famous for the richness and delicacy of its wines, but it has also gained renown on account of a little spot of surpassing beauty, the vale of Fontaine Froide. Just beyond the village of Savigny is a road all overhung with verdure, which leads down to the valley. There beneath the shadow of an immemorial lime a spring gushes forth from the mountain side and falls into a tiny lake, whence, spreading out fanlike, it continues its descent in little crystalline cascades. Day by day the Duchess loved, so the story goes, to direct her footsteps towards this delicious scene. There the healing spirit of poesy would descend upon her, and many a time and oft would she lament that the nymphs of Sceaux, the home of her former splendours, had no such pure sweet-murmuring spring for their delight. "Oh, why art thou not with me at Sceaux!" she cried one day when her thoughts wandered from the enchanted fountain to the beloved land for which she longed so sorely. Those very words are now engraven upon the keeper's cottage a few feet away from the fountain.

Still, the charms of the habitation and of its site failed to soothe the exile's grief. Gloomy forebodings haunted her mind; she asked that she might make her will. For this purpose the Regent allowed her to send for a notary, and commanded that every facility should be granted her in the matter.<sup>1</sup>

Upon her arrival at Savigny, Madame du Maine had begged that her daughter might be sent to Anet, where

<sup>1</sup> Le Blanc to La Billarderie, 28th August 1719.

Madame la Princesse, the child's grandmother, kept asking that she should come. This favour was not granted her, and she was transferred from Maubuisson to another convent at Chaillot, while her brothers had been sent to Gien under the guardianship of Monsieur de la Salle, a major in the Piedmont regiment. "I am in hopes," Le Blanc wrote to him, "that their desire to conform to His Royal Highness's wishes will make your task a very light one; still, let me know how everything goes on."<sup>1</sup>

As the summer of 1719 began to draw to a close, the unwearied petitioner asked once again to be brought nearer the capital. The Regent, influenced by Dubois and Saint-Simon, decided that she must still remain in exile, but that she should be placed within easier reach of her own people. In September, therefore, she was transferred for the third time, on this occasion to Champlay, near Joigny. The journey gave some trouble on account of Madame du Maine's unsatisfactory state of health, but La Billarderie, who had his hands pretty full, spared the exile no attentions. The Duchess remunerated the servants of the houses where she had to halt for the night on a princely scale. La Billarderie had visited the Château de Champlay, and offered some objections to it as a residence on account of the fact that there was an outbreak of dysentery in the village. Seeing, however, that the epidemic was general throughout France, the Regent overruled the objection, and urged the Duchess to agree to reside there. "You quite understand," wrote Le Blanc to La Billarderie, "that you must not leave her until she is settled."

Champlay is an immense house, surrounded by gardens designed by Le Nôtre.<sup>2</sup> Louis XIV. had the place built

<sup>1</sup> Le Blanc to La Salle, 6th February 1719.

<sup>2</sup> "Archives de Joigny." Information obtained from Monsieur Picard, member of the Academy of Dijon.

for Monsieur Bollé, Marquis de Champlay, during one of the campaigns in which he proved so brilliant a collaborator of Louvois, as a reward for his signal services. The Marquis de Champlay had just died, leaving no heirs, and the house was therefore vacant; "a well furnished and commodious place," Saint-Simon called it. At the time the Duchess came there to resume her exile for yet a few months longer, it was October, when the countryside is at its loveliest, and when the vine branches take on a crimson glow, after the grapes have been gathered in. Madame la Princesse received permission to visit the Duchess and to remain two or three days. Though she herself was allowed to be alone with her daughter, the ladies who accompanied her, Mesdemoiselles de Langeron and de Guitaut, were only permitted to interview Madame du Maine in the presence of La Billarderie.<sup>1</sup> Dr Armand, one of the King's regular medical attendants, was sent to Champlay at the end of October. Le Blanc displayed great politeness in introducing him. "I hope," he said, "that Her Most Serene Highness will think favourably of his abilities and attentiveness." But there was no improvement in the exile's state of health. "I should be very glad to be able to remedy Madame du Maine's present condition, but she must try to exercise a little reason. The hopes (of regaining her freedom) which Madame la Princesse gives her in the enclosed letter ought to persuade her to have patience."

Madame de Condé's first care on arriving at Champlay had been to press her daughter to make a full confession. Le Blanc had doubtless inspired her with this intention. At all events it was in his mind, for on the 29th November he wrote to La Billarderie as follows:—

Madame la Duchesse du Maine is not unaware that some of those whom she formerly honoured with her confidence have

<sup>1</sup> Le Blanc to La Billarderie, 19th October 1719.

explained the special character of the various ministerial duties, so to speak, with which she entrusted them, so that it will be a simple matter to determine whether the avowal which she proposes to make to His Royal Highness is sincere, or whether she is suppressing some of the most material facts. Since she has assured you of her anxiety to reconcile herself with His Royal Highness, there must be a clear understanding that she will give a full and true account of what took place in the different provinces of the Kingdom or in foreign countries, as well as of the relationships which she, or those acting under her orders, entered into with the view of bringing about the realisation of their schemes. It is further necessary that Madame du Maine should state the names of those who composed the various pamphlets on her instructions, some of which were dictated in her presence.

You have made yourself aware of the Regent's feelings in this matter, and of his desire that the Duchess should be restored to her proper position ; it therefore rests with you to persuade her that the avowal with which she entrusts you should leave no room for doubt that she has entirely relinquished the ideas which had been suggested to her, and to which the Regent is only too anxious to think that she yielded a reluctant assent.

You perceive how vastly important it is that Madame du Maine should recognise that to prove the whole-heartedness of her recantation and to confirm His Royal Highness in the favourable views with which your report has inspired him, she must give without any reserve a full account of all the circumstances governing the events that have taken place, for she cannot but know that the manœuvres which were practised are in no sense a secret.

Madame du Maine had great difficulty in bringing herself to make her declaration, since she was reluctant to involve her accomplices. For a long time she protested that in all she had done there was nothing directed against the King or the State, nothing essentially prejudicial even to the interests of the Regent. Her mother impressed upon her the urgent necessity of procuring the Duc du Maine's release from prison, for he had recently

been attacked by a dangerous illness. But the Duchess put forward the drawbacks entailed by such a course, being anxious to know above everything if her fellow-conspirators had confessed their complicity.

I am, she wrote to the Regent, fully as much concerned about those whom I have named as I am about myself, and I imagine you would have but scant respect for me if it were otherwise. You know how unreservedly I have placed myself in your hands . . . please therefore vouchsafe to restore their liberty to those for whom I have begged it. Although Monsieur le Cardinal de Polignac is not in prison, I ask that you will be so kind as to recall him. . . . I rely entirely on your generosity.

In her letter of the 14th December, Madame du Maine displays her eagerness to be received again into favour and to return to Sceaux.

It is beyond doubt that I am in peril of dying. I know that you have never desired my death. I take the liberty, Monsieur, of begging that as you have made me speak you will pardon those who were engaged in this unhappy affair, and whom I have been obliged to name in order that nothing whatever might be withheld from you. I have no doubts concerning either your clemency or your generosity, and it is in this spirit of confidence that I have placed myself completely in your hands. I should be in despair did I think that there lingered in your mind the smallest doubt as to my sincerity, and I am anxious to omit nothing that may serve thoroughly to convince you.

I make so bold as to beg with all the force at my command that you will restore Monsieur du Maine to liberty. I congratulate myself that, in view of the testimony which I bore in my memorial to his innocence, you will entertain no further doubts so far as he is concerned. As for myself, Monsieur, it is to your generosity that I look to set a term to my sufferings. You may rely on my word that, wheresoever I may be, if you have any explanation to ask of me, I will give it you with absolute sincerity, and I if do not, then I am willing that you

should shut me up again for the rest of my days in the most horrible of prisons.

Pain at the Duc du Maine's trial having turned my brain, I was unhappy enough, since I could no longer count on the protection of the Duc d'Orléans, to lend too ready an ear to the speeches of several evil counsellors, who urged me to seek the protection of the King of Spain. The return of your good will is what I most earnestly wish for. . . . I take the liberty, Monsieur, of begging that you will keep the whole of this matter secret ; it is a favour which I beseech you to accord me. I am asking the same secrecy of Madame la Princesse.

By Monsieur de La Billarderie I am sending you a very full and perfectly sincere confession. I can assure you that my self-examination has been most strictly carried out, and that I could not have performed it with more scrupulous care had I been making my confession to God. Grant me, then, I beg of you, the absolution which you were so gracious as to promise me.

She finishes the letter with the following words in her own handwriting :

I certify that I have dictated this memorial to Monsieur de Billarderie, and that it contains nothing but the truth.

(Sgnd.) LOUISE BÉNÉDICTE DE BOURBON.

It is not merely a question of my interest but of my honour, which is infinitely dearer to me. My case is in your hands, and I can only clear myself of the blame attaching to my conduct by giving entire satisfaction to those affected by it.

Alarmed lest the matter should have a still graver sequel for her, she filled her declaration with the most circumstantial details, cutting the ground from under those who had braved the prison cell, and running the risk of sending to the scaffold the people who possessed her secret.

She confessed that in Brittany her supporters had organised themselves into a body to further her designs, and that the Spanish project had a real existence. Her list of conspirators she headed with her own name.



She laid no charge against those whom she had drawn into the plot, but she mentioned their names, and thus delivered them into the hands of their accusers. The prisoners for whom she pleaded with ardour were those who were attached to her by personal ties. Of the rest she even spoke with a sort of scorn, and she seems to have entertained but scant respect and little gratitude for the puppets whom she had compelled to dance to her tune. Pompadour, Laval, d'Aydie, all who had been cognisant of her plot, found a place in her statement. Thus the ramifications of the whole scheme swiftly became apparent to the practised eyes of Dubois and his myrmidons.

The Duchess would allow no blame to attach to her husband,<sup>1</sup> declaring that she and everyone else had carefully abstained from saying a word to a man so easily scared, and that had they let him into the secret the whole scheme would have collapsed in a moment. She added that in a panic he might have divulged everything to the Regent, and that the greatest difficulty in the whole business had been to conceal matters from the Duc du Maine.

A confession so complete resulted in the unconditional liberation of the exile of Champlay. The Regent considered that he had sufficiently avenged himself on husband and wife by the humiliation he had made them undergo. To such an imperious princess, who had so long been accustomed to playing the tyrant over her subordinates, this year of prison and exile seemed like a century. "Human suffering," as a present-day writer has observed, "ceased thenceforward to present merely a vague and far-off significance to her mind." Whether she had profited or not by her experience she had at

<sup>1</sup> The statement of the Duchess is to be found in the MSS. of the "B.N.," and a copy of it in the "A.E." The full text has been published by Vatout in the "Conspiration de Cellamare."

all events come to the end of her tether. But her protestations were sincere, and her subsequent conduct did not belie them.

Monsieur de La Billarderie came to Champlay to give her back her freedom and to set her en route. Writing from Sens on the 6th January 1720 in the course of her journey, she again thanked the Regent with effusion for setting her at liberty and permitting her to return to Sceaux. So fearful was she lest the promise that she should go back to her favourite residence should prove but a vain deceit, that she felt obliged to refer to it again. "I should derive no pleasure from this favour," she says, "unless you did me the further kindness of readmitting me to your friendship . . . I was ready to die when Monsieur de La Billarderie arrived." Such was her style.

During her journey from Champlay to Sceaux the Duchess wrote again to the Regent to beseech his pardon :

My repentance is most sincere. The penance I have undergone has been very long and very harsh, and I can assure you the desire I have to correct my faults is stronger than any other feeling. I think, Monsieur, that you will readily convince yourself that this is the case, and that you will understand how much my recent confession has cost me.

No one could have been more humble.

The Duc du Maine had lost none of his tender affection for Madame de Maintenon, and retained a grateful recollection of the motherly care which Louis'morganatic wife had bestowed upon him as a child. In her retreat at Saint-Cyr she had been terrified at the recklessness with which the du Maines had embarked on their wild adventure. She knew well enough that the little Duchess was at the bottom of the plot, and prudently avoided entangling herself in the net. Nevertheless, the Princess Palatine throws some of the responsibility on to Madame



Madame de Maintenon

*From an engraving in the British Museum*



de Maintenon's shoulders,<sup>1</sup> saying that "she alone had brought the pair of them into misfortune by telling them that if they were not at the head of affairs it was an injustice, and that they had as much right to reign as King Solomon had."

The ex-favourite, who was preyed upon by a sorrow whose only end was the grave, had fainted away when she heard of the double arrest of the Lord and Lady of Sceaux. It shortened her days, and she felt the degradation of her adopted son more keenly than the death of the King himself. "The Duc du Maine used frequently to pay his respects to her at Saint-Cyr."<sup>2</sup> Madame de Genlis has recorded that after she had heard of his imprisonment the fever never left her. She died of grief quite as much as of old age three months later, on the 15th April 1719. Her beloved ones were still in prison, and therefore could not come to close her eyes.

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de la Palatine."

<sup>2</sup> Duclos, "Mémoires, Correspondance de Madame."

## CHAPTER XIV

Pontcallec's conspiracy (1719)—The Duchesse du Maine and Brittany—Alberoni's empty promises to the Bretons—Royal Commission at Nantes—Break-up of the party—Pontcallec—Execution of the Breton gentlemen (26th March 1720)—Fate of Cardinal de Polignac—President de Mesmes' adventure—Attitude and mode of life of the Duc du Maine at Doullens—His release (29th December 1719)—His sojourn at Clagny—Interview at Vaugirard—Return of the Duc du Maine to Sceaux—Public effect of the du Maines' imprisonment—Ringleaders in the Bastille—Arrest of the Duc de Richelieu (20th March 1719)—Pompadour—Foucault de Magny—Laval—Part played by Villars and Villeroi in the plot—General indignation against the Duchess on account of her imprudent avowals—Verdict concerning the Cellamare conspiracy.

**D**ESPITE the efforts of Dubois' police, they were a long way from succeeding in laying all the conspirators by the heels, particularly in the provinces. "I've got the head and tail of the monster," said the Regent humorously, "but I have not got its body." From evidence contained in the declaration of the Duchess's accomplices, there would appear to have been a more or less close connection between Cellamare's plot and the troubles which broke out at the same time in certain provinces of France, especially in the north and the west, and most conspicuously of all in Poitou, Picardy and Brittany.

According to the statement of one of the conspirators, Monsieur de Boisdavy, the origin of the disturbances in Poitou was to be traced to the Duchess's intrigues.<sup>1</sup> Copies of a petition to the Regent concerning the grievances of the Bastard Princes were distributed

<sup>1</sup> "Lemontey," vol. ii. p. 409, Declaration by M. de Boisdavy.

throughout the province by the Duc du Maine himself, who, in the case of several Poitevin nobles, accompanied the despatch by a circular letter containing gracious and flattering assurances of his goodwill. This was doubtless a fault, but it was not a crime. Boisdavy, whose reply was couched in terms of great respect, promised his assistance, and thus attracted the attention of the Duchesse du Maine. In Anjou this same gentleman had several meetings with the Comte de Laval, and indited a wildly imprudent epistle to the Duc du Maine, in which he spoke of urging the Breton and Poitevin nobility to revolt. Neither Boisdavy nor Laval gained any adherents among the Poitevin nobility.

A letter from the Marquis de Pompadour to the minister Le Blanc supplies some interesting information regarding the secret history of the Spanish business, and shows that the Marquis de Laval, acting under orders from Sceaux, had been keeping up a regular correspondence with the Provinces. The Abbé Brigault's statement makes it clear that important movements were afoot in Poitou. In Brittany matters were graver still. Notwithstanding Madame du Maine's affirmations to the contrary, Pontcallec's plot, as it is called, is too closely bound up with the Cellamare conspiracy for a brief summary to be omitted from these pages.

On the 10th January 1719 the Council of the Regency declared war against Spain. The result of the conflict was the ruin of Philip's Kingdom and the aggrandisement of England. Alberoni was overthrown, and on the 17th February 1720 Spain became a party to the Quadruple Alliance. It was during these hostilities that affairs in Brittany went awry. On the 16th December 1717<sup>1</sup> the governor of the province, Maréchal de Montesquiou, had been compelled to dissolve the States of Dinan,

<sup>1</sup> See the "Conspiration de Pontcallec," published by the "Bulletin Polymathique du Morbihan" (2nd half of year 1871).

they having defied his authority. After this *coup d'état* the Breton nobility had withdrawn to their homes. Voyer d'Argenson, the Keeper of the Seals, sent many of them into exile. Three of the most prominent, Lambilly, Talhouet de Bonamour and Gloësquer, who had been relegated to Paris by his orders, brought with them all their grievances, and proved readily accessible to the emissaries of the Duchesse du Maine. In her confession we find her denying that she had had any personal intercourse with them, and even stating that she had had no traffic with Brittany.

I saw but two gentlemen of that province, and those only once. These were the circumstances. Messieurs de Bonamour and de Noyan, who had been ordered to Paris, sent me word proposing that I should grant them an interview at my house, but to this request, being apprehensive of the consequences, I refused to accede. They then replied by expressing the hope that I would at least permit them to pay their respects to me at the Tuileries, where they were aware I frequently took my walk after supper. To this I gave my consent, and after the people who had been attending me on my promenade had withdrawn, I remained in the garden waiting for these gentlemen, who joined me a moment later. They talked to me at great length about Brittany and of the Maréchal de Montesquiou, making a remarkable proposal of which I showed them the absurdity. They inquired whether I had not some secret understanding with Spain; I replied in the negative, and carefully abstained from telling them anything about my intercourse with the Ambassador. I merely made them a number of polite speeches, and said that I hoped the demands of the *noblesse* would be satisfied.

Madame du Maine frequently glossed over the truth in her statement, but the avowals of her co-intriguers betrayed her. Brigault, who had been cognisant of what was going forward in Brittany through the Duchess's confidential agents, declared that to his knowledge "deputies were introduced to the Duchess by Made-



moiselle de Langeron, or that they communicated with her through that lady." It was in the course of such furtive meetings that the Breton party began to grow into being. The Comtes de Rieux and de Noyan, who had formed an association at Rennes with a policy strongly opposed to the Regency, took part in the conferences at the Arsenal, a circumstance which was not unknown to d'Argenson. On the 15th August 1718, while the States of Brittany, which had been brought together through the efforts of the Parliament, were in session at Dinan, Bonamour and Noyan made their escape from Paris and betook themselves to Rennes to further the cause of the Duchess. Sixty-six gentlemen, expelled from the States by Montesquiou's orders, hastened from Dinan to Rennes at Bonamour's instigation, and there signed a covenant by which they bound themselves to defend the liberties of their province.

Bonamour, Lambilly and Gloësquer, whose ardour was inflamed by the brilliant promises held out by the Duchesse du Maine, "freely devoted their energies to the formation of a party in Brittany"<sup>1</sup> favourable to the interests of the King of Spain, who was threatening war. The Duchess beguiled them with a host of illusory expectations, such as the assistance of the army, the active co-operation of the French nobility, etc. When they learned of the lamentable termination of the Cellamare conspiracy and of Monsieur and Madame du Maine's imprisonment; when events proved the baselessness of the rumours about the troops refusing to serve against the King of Spain; when every messenger brought news of "another French victory on the frontier," they were clearly flying in the face of Providence in persisting with their plans. Yet nothing sufficed to deter them. The two brothers Gloësquer, scouring the province, obtained the signatures of several nobles to the association.

<sup>1</sup> "Vie de Philippe d'Orléans," by L. M. D. M., London, 1736.

Bonamour and Lambilly everywhere insinuated that the only means of doing true service to their King and country lay in declaring for Philip V. Self-interest brought many recruits to Bonamour, among them being several tobacco smugglers, many of whom were ruined noblemen, such as the Marquis de Pontcallec and the Marquis de Salarun. They eagerly threw in their lot with the Spanish party, but brought little enough skill to the enterprise. Pontcallec alone was enough to ruin any cause. He was, according to a contemporary account, "devoid alike of character, courage and ability, and in very ill-repute."

This famous faction,<sup>1</sup> which was to herald in a revolution, consisted at the very most of thirty or forty nobles, without troops, arms or money. A request for funds was sent to Cardinal Alberoni. The emissary selected for this mission was one Hervieux de Mélac, a Breton and an ex-officer. He gave out at Madrid that he could count on eight hundred nobles of his province to espouse the Spanish cause. Alberoni, desirous of creating a diversion in Brittany, in order to neutralise the effect of the French victories in the Pyrenees, received the envoy with open arms, and promised handsome assistance in the shape of men and money, a promise which in the event came to very little. Of all these matters Montesquieu forwarded inflated reports to the Regent. The reticent avowals of the Duchesse du Maine, coupled with the statements of certain Breton informers, had led Le Blanc to despatch a body of twelve commissioners to hunt out the malcontents.

Owing to the fact that no general exchange of views had taken place between them, the greater number of those who had been mentioned by the Duchess as being involved in the Cellamare conspiracy had not even had any very clear notion of what they had been plotting

<sup>1</sup> M. de la Borderie's narrative ("Revue de Bretagne et Vendée").

about. But no sooner did the Regent learn that the unrest in Brittany was a result of the Duchess's machinations against himself, than he determined, on the advice of the Keeper of the Seals, to make a striking example of the offenders, though the princes who had been the first to stir up sedition in France he let off, as we have seen, lightly enough. He appointed a Royal Tribunal<sup>1</sup> with unlimited powers to try and to judge the offenders. The latter, scenting the approach of danger, had managed to win over some officers and men from the regiment of La Ferté, and hoped by this means to hold the royal troops in check. Meanwhile, *lettres de cachet* were out against them, and all those to whom suspicion attached were summoned to take their trial.

When some Spanish vessels appeared off Belle-Isle, matters seemed to be reaching a crisis. It was supposed that they were about to belch forth ten thousand fighting men to capture Port Louis, but as a matter of fact they merely turned out to be two or three ordinary sloops of war. The threats of criminal proceedings sent all the malcontents scuttling off to their homes. Only Pontcallec and his more intimate associates, Montlouis, Talhouet, Lemoine and Couëdic refused to fly. They were arrested and conveyed to the Château de Nantes. Salarun and Lantillac, were afterwards incarcerated there, and both confessed their guilt.

After wandering like a hunted animal from forest to forest, Pontcallec was treacherously delivered into the hands of his pursuers. One of his accomplices, the Comte de Noyan, was arrested in Paris, thrown into the Bastille, and thence transferred to Nantes. The special court brought in a verdict of guilty against the prisoners. In the council chamber at the Palais Royal d'Argenson, Dubois and Law strongly dissuaded the

<sup>1</sup> By letters patent dated 3rd October 1719. MSS. in Bibliothèque de l'Arsenal, 10679 to 10687.

Regent from exercising his clemency, and orders were given to put the sentence of death into execution.

It was on the 26th March 1720 that the words pronouncing their doom were read over to the four unhappy men; Clément de Guer, the Marquis de Pontcallec, François du Couëdic and Siméon de Montlouis. They were allowed till eight o'clock to prepare for death, and each was visited by a Carmelite friar, in order that he might make ready for his journey into the next world. An hour later they were led forth from the Castle of Nantes to the market-place at Bouffai, where their heads were severed from their bodies.

This fatal measure made a deep impression on the hearts of the Breton people. It was felt that these gentlemen were more misguided than criminal, and yet they had paid the penalty with their lives at the very hour when the Duc du Maine was being received again into the Regent's good graces, and when the Duchess, at Sceaux, was inclining her ear to the flattering utterances of her pampered *bêtes*. They fell as victims to the ambitions of princes who had sacrificed nothing, not a single hair of their heads, for the sake of their too trustful followers. It was but a few days after the execution that the reconciliation took place between the Duc du Maine and the Regent, and the contrast between the indulgence displayed to this prince and the relentless rigour shown to his guileless confederates did not fail to excite general observation. "A fine lesson," exclaimed Marmontel, "for the plain man who is weak and foolish enough to interfere in the quarrels of the great."

Madame du Maine was still separated from her children. This was her heaviest cross. Her sons were kept at Clagny, and saw her only during an occasional visit, while her daughter was not suffered to leave the Convent at Chaillot.<sup>1</sup> As yet the Duchess only enjoyed a sort

<sup>1</sup> "Journal de Dangeau."

of semi-freedom at Sceaux, and the Regent set a limit to the number of her guests. Many of her former intimates had drawn off from her for fear of giving offence in high places. Despite a sort of outward reconciliation, there was no cordiality in her relations with the Palais Royal. Polignac, the handsome Cardinal, who had grown very weary of his exile at Anchin, gave the government to understand that, in order to avoid giving umbrage to the Regent, he had quite broken off his friendship with the Queen of Sceaux. He scarcely deigned to glance at the statement which she had been so anxious to send to him. No sooner was his exile at an end than he set out for Rome without a word of farewell to her, and nothing more was heard of him till he resumed his diplomatic activities some time later.

The Duchess in her confession had let down her other friend, President de Mesmes, very lightly. Conscious of his guilt, however, this disingenuous individual did not feel altogether easy in his mind about his position. He engaged an intriguing woman of the court, la Chaussaye, to procure him a secret audience of the Regent.<sup>1</sup> Philippe reluctantly consented, and after allowing his victim to entoil himself in a labyrinth of lies, drew a letter from his pocket, exclaiming, "Hold, Monsieur, read that! Do you recognise it?" It was an autograph letter in which de Mesmes assured Spain of the Parliament's support, and openly referred to the conspiracy. The Chief President of the Parliament of Paris flung himself at the feet of the Regent, who, at first, was quite resolved to have him arrested for such colossal effrontery. La Chaussaye had great difficulty in preventing this decision being put into immediate execution. In the end the Prince relented, and the affair remained a secret.

At Doullens, in his narrow prison, the Duc du Maine maintained his attitude of Christian resignation, never

<sup>1</sup> Marmontel, "Mémoires."

murmuring, and accusing nobody. Only when they told him of his wife's confession did his habitual calm desert him. Then he hastened to repudiate her actions, and broke out into reproaches against what he termed her madness, loudly bewailing the fate that had united him to an irresponsible woman capable of involving him without his knowledge in so criminal an enterprise. He pleaded his innocence and begged for indulgence, since there was no proof against him. He displayed an entire humility and gentleness towards his warders, setting them an example of lofty virtue, often falling on his knees in prayer, practising deep devotion, fasting so rigorously as to undermine his health. He was grudgingly allowed a few books to read and the wherewithal to write a letter. It was only towards the end of his sojourn that he was permitted to go shooting within a very circumscribed area, never sleeping away from his prison. His mind was often ill at ease, and if we are to credit the words of his most inveterate detractor, he "would grow pale and fancy himself dead" at the slightest unusual sound. The report had got abroad that he was being treated with undue harshness by his gaolers. The *Princesse de Conti*, his cousin, wrote to inquire whether he wished an attempt to be made to procure their removal, but he refused to be the means of depriving them of their places, and spoke highly of the various attentions that were shown him, particularly by the governor of the prison, *Monsieur de Favancourt*.

At length, on the 29th December 1719, he was pardoned and set at liberty at the same time as his wife, precisely one year after his arrest. At his request he was conveyed to his *château* at Clagny, having no great wish to renew relations with his *Duchess* at Sceaux. He had barely recovered from an attack of cholera morbus, and was debilitated and soured by a captivity which he owed

to his turbulent consort. Financially embarrassed, uneasy about the future, undecided as to how he ought to bear himself, trusting perhaps that by living away from his wife he would convince the Regent of his innocence, he proceeded to dwell in seclusion for a time, whilst the Duchess, journeying homeward by easy stages, alighted en route at château after château. The *lettre de cachet* that sent her back to Sceaux also forbade her to leave her own palace. When the carriages that were to convey her arrived at Champlay, under the conduct of Monsieur de Saily, her equerry, she never suspected that this most unwelcome condition was being hidden from her. It was a too loquacious concierge at Fontainebleau who let the cat out of the bag. There she learned that she was not only to dwell apart from her husband, but that he was not going to permit his children to visit their mother, being still afraid that she would exert an undesirable influence over them.

She returned to Sceaux, then, to find her hearth deserted, and to learn that the Regent had been so ungracious as to read out to the whole council the humble avowal that she had allowed to be dragged from her under a promise that it would not be made public. She could not endure the thought that her enemies had listened to her tale of excuses. However, she forgot everything in her desire to bring her husband again beneath her sway. To the Regent she wrote as follows :—

I had flattered myself that the pardon you would grant me would be full and unconditional, . . . and that things would be the same for me at Sceaux as they were after the Bed of Justice. You are aware, Monsieur, that all my family were with me there, and that you never placed any restrictions on my movements. How painful it is for me to bear this lingering remnant of disgrace! Were it to endure for long, I should find it a harder trial than prison itself. I earnestly implore

you, therefore, to put an end to it by allowing Monsieur du Maine to come to me at Sceaux, and by according me the honour of being permitted to see you . . . I shall put the liberty you have granted me to no use that would not consort with your wishes.

At first the Regent refused to interfere in this conjugal trouble. The Duchess returned to the charge and obtained another audience. "Promise, at all events, that you will not prevent my reunion with Monsieur du Maine." "The matter, Madame, depends upon yourself rather than upon me. Sganarelle has bidden us beware of putting our finger between the bark and the tree." What was the main object of the Queen of Sceaux? Undoubtedly to get the Duc back there under her domination. She had two interviews with the Regent, the one at the Palais Royal about the 15th February 1720, the other at Saint-Cloud on the 23rd March. There she obtained leave to visit Paris whenever she wished, and also to receive her husband. This put her on the very pinnacle of delight. On taking leave of Philippe d'Orléans, according to the story of the Princess Palatine, she rose up from her seat, and flinging her arms round his neck, kissed him, willy-nilly, on both cheeks.<sup>1</sup>

The Regent's consent was not the whole of the business—the Duc du Maine had to be persuaded too. But he was firm in his resolve not to quit Clagny. It was from there that he went to make his peace with the Regent. He was permitted, with scarcely any delay, to resume his various official duties, including the Grand Mastership of the Artillery at the Arsenal. He was at Clagny six months, from January to July 1720.

Still reluctant to submit himself a second time to his wife's tormenting domination, he refused to see her on her return to Sceaux. He pretended that he did

<sup>1</sup> "Correspondance complète de Madame," vol. ii., p. 241.



not wish to hear anything about her, whether by letter or word of mouth. She, on the other hand, never ceased to lament her fate, telling everybody that she alone was to blame, and displaying inconsolable grief at being in disfavour with her husband. With the hope of casting off the yoke once and for all, the Duc du Maine proposed a mutual separation on the basis of a monetary settlement. But the Duchess, who desired a reconciliation at all costs, declined the offer. She persuaded her mother to discuss matters with the Duc, and even employed Cardinal de Noailles "to attack him on the conscientious side." This comedy, Saint-Simon tells us, had been going on ever since January.

A cold and constrained meeting between husband and wife took place on neutral ground at Vaugirard on the 29th July 1720. It was quite like a scene out of a novel. "I have brought a lady with me who greatly desires to see you," said the Princesse de Conti, who had come with her aunt. The Duc du Maine knew well enough who the lady was, and pulled a wry face. However, they greeted each other, remained some considerable time together, and then went their ways after the usual good-byes. This time the Duc du Maine was sufficiently strong-minded to maintain the attitude of the forgiving husband. A host of his friends came to visit him at Clagny,<sup>1</sup> but the Duc d'Orléans was much more chary about allowing people to visit Sceaux. The "Shepherdess" was such a doubtful character that he was still afraid she would turn her home into a hive of malcontents. Though Madame du Maine came to Paris from time to time to see the princesses, she was never permitted to pass the night away from Sceaux.

The Duc du Maine upbraided his wife for the money she had squandered on the plot. Anxious to put an end to her folly, he was willing to set aside a certain sum

<sup>1</sup> Dangeau, "Journal."

for her maintenance, and to make arrangements for paying off her debts.

These separation schemes had a more painful effect on the Duchess than public censure or even the defection of those who had once been accustomed to tremble at her nod. So urgently did she plead with her husband, that he at length gave way. He allowed a little time to elapse, and then returned to live at Sceaux, to the huge vexation of the Princess Palatine. "If the reconciliation takes place," she shrieked, "I shall say, make it up then, *canailles!*"<sup>1</sup>

The Duc du Maine, who brought his children back with him, returned home broken in spirit. He had laid aside ambition. Rarely, and then only when his duties compelled him, did he go to Court. He busied himself with his accounts and his books. Latin, in which he excelled, was his great consolation. The Duchess wrote an ode to celebrate his home-coming, and made every effort to comfort him. But the unhappy prince's spirit never recovered from the terrible blow it had received; "he had lost those airy graces which Louis XIV. and Madame de Maintenon had once so much admired."

Matters resumed their normal course at Sceaux. Save that another lustrum had passed over her head, the heroine of the Cellamare conspiracy was the same woman that had set out for Versailles when Louis XIV. was on his death-bed. If any change had taken place in her it was that she now entertained a salutary dread of the police. Of politics she was cured for ever. Painfully and laboriously she set about gathering together the scattered remnants of her court. The greater number of those who had frequented her salon, although they had all suffered more or less in the general discomfiture, were but too eager to take up the thread of their former

<sup>1</sup> "Correspondance de Madame."

light-hearted existence. Madame du Maine again resumed the rôle of wit and patroness of letters. Though days of splendour were about to dawn for the noble castle and its honoured guests, a certain heaviness seemed still to linger on at Sceaux. The nightmare of the ill-fated plot could not be shaken off by the Duc and Duchesse du Maine, and since they had become suspect in the eyes of the government, they were anxious to do nothing that might be construed as an act of hostility against the established powers.

The Regent's conduct in the matter of the conspirators had won the admiration of all moderate men. The public, who had for a long time dubbed him "Philippe l'Empoisonneur," henceforth called him "Philippe le Débonnaire."

The readiness with which the Duchess had turned approver evoked very unfavourable comment. Still, it must not be forgotten that she urged Madame la Princesse to prevail on the Regent to fulfil his promise and release the prisoners who remained in the Bastille. The various participants in the plot met with somewhat diverse fates. According to Saint-Simon "several people, but none of any great position, were sent successively to the Bastille and Vincennes." In affairs of this kind it is not invariably the smallest people who pay the smallest penalty. But all the band, whether led on by conviction as some were, by devotedness as others, or by money as many more, only erred in one respect—they bound themselves blindly to the Duchess's car without taking the height of the precipice which menaced them.

Cardinals not being subject to arrest, recourse was had to the right of sending them into exile. As a consequence, Cardinal de Polignac received orders to betake himself to Anchin, one of his abbeys in the north, and to remain there. "It is love that has turned his head,"

wrote Madame la Palatine malignantly. "He used to be very friendly with the Regent; it is only since he became attached to that little owl that he has changed."

Malézieu was shut up in the Bastille on the 10th December 1719, at the same time as Mademoiselle de Launay. They were regarded as the chief agents of the Duchess, and the government detained them as long as possible on charges of a more or less flimsy character, which a court of law would soon have ruled out of order. For example, it was alleged that poor Nicolas de Malézieu, half poet, half mathematician, had by his own efforts collected sufficient muskets to arm thirty-five thousand men, and that he had secreted them in places known only to himself.

A hundred and fifty names appeared on a list of persons who were to go to prison, and they were all sent to consider their politics under lock and key. Among the first batch were Mademoiselle de Montauban and Madame de Langeron, ladies-in-waiting to the Duchess, the ambitious Comte de Laval, who had already pictured himself as the General or Chief Minister of the du Maines, the Marquis de Pompadour, whom Saint-Simon calls "a cold and melancholy big-wig;" the Marquis de Courcillon, the Comtes d'Aydie and de Saillant, the Chevaliers de Saint-Geniès, de Gavaudun, de Boisdavy and du Ménil; the Advocate-General Dadvisart, Bargillon, the Abbé Le Camus, the valets Davranches and Despavots. The last mentioned were arrested and examined on the strength of information supplied by Dame Dupuy, and also of some intercepted correspondence in which Madame du Maine was referred to as "La Reine du grand roman."

But it was the imprisonment of the young and brilliant Duc de Richelieu that produced the greatest sensation in the fashionable circles of the capital. We will follow him for a brief space within the walls of the Bastille,

and he himself shall give us an account of the place. As the Duke says in his story,<sup>1</sup> Dubois, cunning fowler that he was, had snared all the birds in the nest. Nevertheless, it was not until the end of March, after a whole host of revelations, interrogatories, discoveries and perquisitions, that the grand-nephew of the great Cardinal was pounced upon by that dignitary's unworthy successor, Dubois, and his two acolytes, Le Blanc and d'Argenson, a trio whom the prisoners in the Bastille nicknamed Minos, Æacus and Rhadamanthus. Heedless of the arrests that had already been effected, Richelieu, as though he wished to defy the Regent, had most rashly made his appearance in Paris. On the 20th March 1720, Mademoiselle de Valois sent a note to warn him that his name had been brought up at the last council. He proceeded to make an auto-da-fé of all his papers save a letter from Alberoni, which he very imprudently retained. One morning, just as he was about to get out of bed, Monsieur du Chavron, a lieutenant of the city police, came to arrest him, and he was obliged to conceal himself behind the curtains while he swallowed the tell-tale missive. Its disappearance mattered very little. The Regent was already in possession of four letters which Richelieu had written to Alberoni, three of them signed, in which he undertook to surrender Bayonne, together with his regiment and that of the Marquis de Saillant. This it was that made the Regent remark that if the young colonel had four heads he had enough in his pocket to make him lose them all.

Once in the Bastille, he was subjected to a rigorous cross-examination, and there was nothing for it but to confess his guilt. He had thought to bring about a revolution in the country, and to receive the command of the guards as a reward. He refused to betray his accomplices, and Dubois' police found nothing but

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Richelieu," Lescure's edition,

love-letters in his casket. It was to his vanity that he owed his evil plight. He had thrown in his lot with the Spaniards after receiving a letter from Alberoni explaining the various schemes of the cabal, and he was preparing to engineer a rising in the South when all was discovered. He appears to have borne the hardships of his captivity with his usual imperturbable good humour. As the revolt had not entered on the practical stage, his life was not in danger. It was merely a question of imprisonment, though that, for such a Sybarite as he, was hardship enough. "A damp and chilly hovel"—such is his description of the place—"one of those stone cages on the topmost floor of the towers which the gaolers call *calottes*. Nothing but a hole to let the air in; a tallow dip thrust into the wall; no fire, no table, no chair and no bedstead. A pitcher of water, a bundle of straw, a counterpane full of holes; a sort of watchman's loft." As, however, his health began to fail, concessions were made from time to time, and he was given a less undesirable lodging in the prisoners' favourite quarters, not far from the charming Mademoiselle de Launay. He was allowed a few books, a backgammon board and a bass-viol; he was able to write, to correspond with his fellow-prisoners, and to sing at the open window a duet from *Iphigenia* with his fair neighbour. Permission was granted him to take exercise on the bastion of the fortress, to dine with the governor with two of his companions in misfortune, Boisdavy and Pompadour, and to pay visits to another of them, the Marquis de Laval, known as Laval-Mentonnière.

Springtime arrives. Richelieu within his prison walls has become the hero of the hour. Behold him a martyr enshrined in every heart! The Regent, finding something humorous in the attitude of the imprisoned gallant, allows him everything he cares to ask for—a valet-de-chambre, a couple of lackeys, so that instead of liberty







the handsome captive soon has license. He may take his walks "in curled peruke and broidered coat, or pink silk dressing gown tricked out with white ribbons," upon the terrace of the Bastille, while down below the "merveilleuses" stay their carriages as they pass by to catch a glimpse of this irresistible Adonis. The Rue Saint-Antoine becomes the haunt of Beauty and Fashion. Our self-satisfied young coxcomb writes that his lips, his eyes and his hands grew weary in returning the smiles, the sweet looks and greetings that were wafted up to him by his lovely sympathisers, who, kerchief in hand, thronged the windows of the neighbouring houses or passed by in the street below in carriages so numerous that they had to be driven at walking pace in one long file. Ah! what sighs for his lost liberty! What hosts of billets-doux from anonymous fair ones! What fluttering bosoms! What schemes to win his pardon! *Sawons Richelieu!* was the cry that thrilled from a hundred rosebud lips. It was Love, warm Love to the rescue, and Love threw wide his massy prison doors. The two fair damsels who were the foremost competitors for his heart flung aside their rivalry to win his freedom, and besieged the Regent with their passionate pleadings.<sup>1</sup> One of them, Mademoiselle de Charolais, the Duc de Bourbon's pretty sister, Richelieu had had painted as a Franciscan friar, and it was on this portrait that Voltaire wrote the following charming quatrain:—

Frère Ange de Charolois,  
Par quelle étrange aventure,  
Le cordon de Saint-François  
Sert à Vénus de ceinture! <sup>2</sup>

Foucault de Magni, the son of a Councillor of State, "a madman," according to Duclos, "who had never

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Duclos."

<sup>2</sup> Come say, Brother Charolois, how it comes about that the girle of Saint Francis has been made into a zone for Venus' waist!

done anything sensible in his life except take to flight, sought refuge in monastery after monastery, dwelt a long time with the Jesuits, and escaped the Bastille." Another conspirator, Schlieben, a wit and a *beau parleur*, had lived a long time at the Court of Spain, where he had played the part of a spy to the Princesse des Ursins. He was arrested on the frontier, and ordered by his captors to get into the diligence and not to speak in the presence of the other passengers. Imagine the consternation of the latter when they were driven straight into the Bastille! They all thought for a moment that they were going to be shut up with Schlieben, and nearly fainted with terror.

The Comte de Laval did not find the Bastille at all to his taste, and in order to bid farewell to it as early as possible, he had recourse to the strangest expedients. He had confided his scheme for escaping to an apothecary, who, in order to have an opportunity of conferring with the prisoner, came twice a day to give him a clyster. But the ruse leaking out, Dubois was for putting a stop to the apothecary's attentions. The Regent was more "débonnaire." "Since it's the only pleasure the prisoner has left, let him go on with it," said he.

Laval had been informed against by Pompadour, who had been intimidated with threats of the scaffold, and who was anxious to save his own head at the expense of other people's. There is nothing like a detected plot to show where the poltroons are. They wrung from him a confession in his own handwriting. "He made an ingenuous confession," says Madame de Staal, "without omitting or disguising anything."<sup>1</sup> "Monsieur de Pompadour," wrote the Regent's mother, "was able to say all that was necessary to bring about the arrest of his accomplices. He had been so simple as to avow that when he was plotting with the Duchesse du Maine,

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires," vol. ii., p. 7.

the latter would break off the conversation the moment the Duc appeared." However ingloriously such a statement may have reflected on the Duc, it, at all events from the purely legal point of view, tended to establish his innocence. D'Argenson therefore had it erased from the report. Pompadour was rewarded with the permission to take the air on the balcony of the Bastille, and he was very shortly afterwards removed from the prison and sent to dwell in forced retirement on his own estate.<sup>1</sup>

At the beginning of the year 1720, only very few prisoners remained at the Bastille. In the provinces fifteen hundred arrests had been effected and upheld. Searches had been carried out at Sceaux; the Duc's papers and even those of the servants had been ransacked. In the Duchess's belongings only valueless papers, a few medals, and some Spanish snuff had been discovered.

Among all these subordinate intriguers were one or two prominent men who had compromised themselves to some slight extent. Such were the Marshals de Villars and de Villeroi. In spite of the rumours and evidence which tended to involve them, the Regent would take no steps against them.

When the public became acquainted with the details of this strange conspiracy, the history of which we have only related in so far as it has any close connection with Madame du Maine, opinion was divided on the matter, but no sooner had the first shock of surprise caused by the Duchess's imprisonment passed by, and it became known that she had resolved to make a complete avowal and to leave in the mire all those whom she herself had dragged thither, than the indignation against her became pretty general. The Abbé Maulevrier was desirous of diverting from his friend Madame la Princesse the suspicion (for which, however, there was considerable foundation) of having prompted her daughter to confess.

<sup>1</sup> 5th January 1720 (Dangeau).

“ His attacks on Madame du Maine were more vigorous than anybody’s,” says Dangeau, “ and he accused her of betraying de Polignac and Malézieu. After having implored the mother to repudiate her daughter, he went off himself to visit the Duchess at Sceaux, and to tell her pretty roundly what he thought of her. The reproach was somewhat over-bold, for there was no room for doubt regarding the tenour of Madame la Princesse’s advice. As Maulevrier began to deliver his harangue, the Duchess lying in bed before him was petrified with amazement. Under the pillows were all her letters and those of her mother, and she could readily have confounded Maulevrier, but she hesitated to exasperate a man who was in the confidence of her solitary champion, Madame de Condé. She was fearful, too, of alienating the affections of her mother, who was then lying ill at Versailles. On the 27th January 1720 she went to visit her, and urged her to prevail on the Regent to carry out his promise, and to liberate the prisoners who were still detained in the Bastille.<sup>1</sup>

We talk of “ the conspiracy of Cellamare ” ; it would be more correct to call it “ the conspiracy of the Duchesse du Maine,” for, as has already been observed, it was she who was the soul of the thing. Though her conduct in the matter may have betrayed a good deal of frivolity, she displayed a spirit of initiative that was truly remarkable in a woman. All her strength, all her talent for intrigue, and a great deal of money she freely lavished on the scheme.

According to a letter of Cellamare’s, the Duchess, the Marquis de Pompadour and the Comte de Laval, those three, and those three only, were the key or, if you will, the mainspring of this great business. They alone knew the whole secret.<sup>2</sup> The object of the conspiracy

<sup>1</sup> Archives of the Arsenal, 10677. “ Réclamations Maraine, Landais, Parveaux.”

<sup>2</sup> Cellamare to Grimalds, 13th August 1720 (quoted by Baudrillart).

was in conformity with the interests of Spain, and was regulated by Alberoni. But Cellamare went about the business with an excess of caution, and lacked the courage to grasp the nettle firmly. He had not the boldness of the genuine conspirator.

The Marquis d'Argenson, the author of the "Memoirs," affirms that it was his father, the Keeper of the Seals in 1718, "who by means of the Bed of Justice at the Tuileries and the *Chambre ardente* of Brittany, preserved the Regent's authority, his honour, and perhaps also his liberty and his life. The idea was to shut up the Regent and to bring the King of Spain into France to act in his stead." Such was in truth the aim of the conspirators. But from conception to realisation there lay all the distance that is implied by the utter lack of instruments and means.

Those counsellors of the Duc d'Orléans who urged him to make the most of the matter would have been only too pleased if the Duc du Maine had been discovered to be guilty. Their bias against him even led them to act unworthily. One of the prisoners had recorded in his statement that whenever the Duchess was discussing politics, she would break off the very moment the Duc appeared on the scene. The government official seemed annoyed at the inclusion of a detail which told in the prince's favour, and said sharply to the prisoner, "We are not asking you to plead the cause of the Duc du Maine. Delete that passage." But Madame du Maine was in a different position. It is undeniable that Sceaux was the manufactory of all the letters and all the memorials connected with the plot. So much is proved by the papers that were seized and by the statements of the conspirators, who confessed that the original of the famous letter from the King of Spain to Louis XV., dated 16th March 1718, was written at the Duchesse du Maine's. A memorandum by Dubois, preserved among the archives of

foreign affairs, makes all that pretty plain. But, for the scheme to have had a chance of success, the Duc du Maine ought to have been gifted with the same energy, the same strength of conviction as his wife. The secret should have been more closely kept, and the conspirators more adroit. In a word, the plot was clumsily conceived and rashly carried out.

## CHAPTER XV

Malézieu's return to Sceaux (1722)—Fate of Mademoiselle de Launay—Her love affairs at the Bastille—She comes back to Sceaux—Her flirtations with Dacier and Chaulieu—Marries the Baron de Staal—Her portrait : by herself.

**M**ADAME DU MAINE did her utmost to win back the favour of the Regent. She paid him another visit, and would insist on breaking out into all sorts of wordy explanations. "All is forgotten," said Philippe at last, in order to be rid of her, and with that he put an end to the conversation. But he never set foot inside the Château de Sceaux.

It was not until the end of 1720 that Madame du Maine regained her entire freedom, and it was only after a further interval of two years that she was able to welcome back her beloved Malézieu. He had not been so very harshly treated in prison. They had converted his cell into a physical laboratory for him, and what more could an ex-savant have desired? On the 30th June 1722, Le Blanc, by the Regent's orders, notified the Duc du Maine that Malézieu would be permitted to take up, under his direction, the post of Secretary-General of the Swiss Guards.

Madame du Maine celebrated in verse the return of her factotum to Sceaux, just as she had sung the home-coming of the Duc du Maine.

Solennisez cet heureux jour,  
O Nymphes du Permesse.  
Votre Apollon est de retour :  
Marquez votre allégresse.

Après avoir gémi longtemps  
 De sa cruelle absence,  
 Vous devez, par de nouveaux chants,  
 Célébrer sa présence.<sup>1</sup>

Malézieu soon got into his old groove again ; that is to say that whilst officially he was secretary to the Duc, he once more became in reality secretary to the Duchess. But instead of writing on military matters, he busied himself with minor verse.

It has been said that the Chevalier du Ménil, "the faithful friend of the Abbé Brigault and the faithless lover of Mademoiselle de Launay," had caused the clever *soubrette* to prefer the bolts and bars of the Bastille to the chains of the Palace of Sceaux. If in the course of her long imprisonment the future Madame de Staal showed that she possessed a heart too easily won, she at the same time gave proof of her strength of character. All the wiles that had been attempted to induce her to betray the actors in the conspiracy she had victoriously resisted. In a second examination she was told that several of them had spoken. The Duchess herself, they said, had only gained her freedom by sacrificing those who had exposed themselves to danger in her cause. In spite of them all, Mademoiselle de Launay persisted in her attitude of prudent reserve.

To a letter from Le Blanc, asking her for a formal declaration, she archly replied as follows : "I am twenty-seven, and I have never seen a declaration except in a novel. . . . Tell me on what matters you wish to be enlightened—make the points clear and I will answer you. If I know nothing I can tell you nothing, or if it should concern a secret I have been told to keep, I should

<sup>1</sup> Come, celebrate this happy day, ye nymphs of Permessus. Your Apollo is home again, so give some token of your joy. After having mourned so long his cruel absence, it is meet that ye celebrate his return with new songs.



be still less likely to say anything." " You know about the whole affair," answered Le Blanc in threatening tones, " and you will speak or remain in the Bastille all your life." " Well, Monsieur," was the plucky reply, " it is a very suitable establishment for a penniless young woman like myself." And she refused to utter a word. The Princess Palatine could not forgive her. " Mademoiselle de Launay is a dangerous intriguer," she said to Madame la Princesse, " and one of the ringleaders of the whole conspiracy." Whereto the kind-hearted Anne of Bavaria replied, " And she's in the Bastille!" " I know she is," retorted the Regent's mother, " and richly she deserves it."

The poor girl had been in prison about eighteen months, when one day there came a letter for her from the Duchesse du Maine, couched in terms of mingled gratitude and affection.

I love you, it ran, and esteem you more than ever, yet all that you have done has not surprised me. I knew how clever and how true you were. You will receive every token of my affection, which you merit so well, as soon as I have the pleasure of seeing you. Adieu, ma chère Launay.

But Love brought some amends to Rose de Launay. The Chevalier du Ménéil, her companion in misfortune, and Monsieur de la Maison Rouge, her prison warder, were rivals for her heart when she was in the Bastille. The charming idyll of which she was the heroine and afterwards the innocent victim, ended as she, a nameless and a dowerless girl, might have foreseen it would. The Chevalier had declared his flame, and she, all too credulous, had hearkened to his vows; but scarcely had the faithless lover regained his freedom than he hastened to forget her. The bitterness of such disdain left in her young heart an abiding sadness, so that she even came to look back on her prison days with a sort of

wistful regret. "My life," she has written, "was sweet and tranquil there; nay, I found more freedom than at the court of the Duchess of Sceaux." Those days of captivity, so long and drear, caught a tinge of roseate hue from the play of her lively imagination, from the tenderness of her heart, and from the fond illusions of a passion which she believed sincerely shared.

The portion of Madame de Staal's Memoirs in which she deals with her prison life is of unflinching interest. Curious details of the existence of the prisoners in the Bastille are to be found there, and the story of her love-passages with du Ménil and Maison-Rouge are among the most charming, if indeed they are not the most charming, of all her writings.<sup>1</sup>

Her misfortunes, her cleverness, and her romantic disposition combined to appeal to the heart of Dacier, the translator of Homer, who was now an old man and a widower. "Mademoiselle de Launay," he used to say, "is the one person in the world with whom I could live and who would be worthy of the memory of Madame Dacier." Despite the ridicule that such a disproportionate union would have provoked, Mademoiselle de Launay would have proved willing to accept the offer in order to obtain a position of independence had it not been for the selfish opposition of the Duchess, who was loth to part with so invaluable an assistant. Thus the project was unfulfilled, and Rose de Launay remained at Sceaux.

There it was that she became acquainted with Madame du Deffand, a new habituée of the Palace of Sceaux, who about 1720 entered on a friendship with the Duchess, which grew closer and closer as time went on, and endured for more than thirty years.

Though married as recently as 1718, Madame du Deffand had left her husband to give ear to evil counsellors

<sup>1</sup> "Œuvres de Mme. de Staal"—Ferdinand Bournon, "Mme. de Staal,—Mlle. Aissé—Notice de Sainte-Beuve."

such as Madame de Parabère and Madame de Prie, and to abandon herself to transient love-passages, the Regent himself being one of her paramours. It has been observed that the women of the eighteenth century were worthless in their youth, and never acquired even a modicum of stability until they had turned forty. At twenty-one the Marquise du Deffand was passing through the least satisfactory epoch of her life. Mademoiselle Aïssé, the gifted Circassian, had already had some severe things to say about her in her correspondence. The scepticism displayed by the Marquise in matters of religion had its effect on the mind of her young friend and confidante, Mademoiselle de Launay, who gradually lost the faith of her early youth, and whose letters never contain a single religious reflection.

As frequently happens in the case of a deeply passionate woman or a coquette, all Rose de Launay's thoughts went out to her faithless lover, while to the pure, unselfish devotion of her loyal suitor she displayed complete indifference. With utter coldness she herself relates how the Chevalier de la Maison-Rouge died twelve months after she had left the prison "from grief, because he had been unable to wring from her when in the Bastille the promise of marriage which she had reserved for his rival, and which, at liberty and disillusioned, she might have bestowed on the worthier of the two."<sup>1</sup>

During the five months that had elapsed since she had regained her freedom, the Duchess had been working hard to secure the liberation of her maid-of-honour, but this she could not do without the co-operation of the prisoner herself. Madame du Maine charged her niece to request Le Blanc to sound her just once more. Madame de Conti sent one of her husband's secretaries<sup>2</sup> to the prison armed with an autograph letter from the Duchesse

<sup>1</sup> F. Funck-Brentano, "Légendes et Archives de la Bastille."

<sup>2</sup> M. Bocher.

du Maine, and at last Mademoiselle de Launay was unwillingly forced to make her defence. She drew up a vague, ambiguous statement, in which she only mentioned the names of the Baron de Walef, the woman Pruden, Madame Dupuy and the Abbés Le Camus and de Vayrac. The document concluded with the following non-committal words :—

Such are the only matters in which I had any part or of which any information was given me. All I can add is that I saw Madame du Maine had something on foot, and that she was preoccupied about some matter of which I knew no details. I only observed how anxious she was that the Duc du Maine should have no inkling of it (January 1720). You will recognise, Monseigneur, my sincerity and my deference to your commands.

A few days later there arrived a *lettre de cachet* authorising her release, and on the 1st February 1720 she quitted the Bastille as serenely as she had entered it. "It is true," she laughingly observed, "that in prison you do not work your own will, but then neither do you obey anyone else's." She drove back to Sceaux in the carriage of her aged admirer, the Abbé de Chaulieu (March 1720). Madame du Maine's reception of her was as chilling as it was ungrateful. "Ah, Mademoiselle de Launay, there you are then. I am pleased to see you." And kissing her the Duchess, who was taking the air, continued her stroll. That was all!<sup>1</sup> After the letter the Duchess had sent her in the Bastille, it was certainly too little by half. The poor girl who had sacrificed her liberty for the good of others left her prison in rags, and it was not to Her Most Serene Highness that she was indebted for the renewal of her wardrobe. She merely resumed her former duties, sitting up with her mistress and reading to her as before. It was a poor requital that the devoted

<sup>1</sup> Mlle. de Launay has left the Bastille; she is at Sceaux with Mme. du Maine." (Dangeau, 5th June 1720.)

retainer received from her mistress. "I want women to do my bidding," the Princess used selfishly to declare, "and not to carry on an academy." Though Rose de Launay was warmly received at Sceaux by the brilliant people who acclaimed the return of a witty woman, the Duchess did scarcely anything to increase her domestic comforts or to make her feel more at home. A room with a window and a fire-place in it was her sole recompense for two years of prison. She consoled herself with such illusions and innocent gallantries as were in keeping with her warm-hearted disposition.

Though in company with the other courtiers at Sceaux, and with the Duchess herself, Mademoiselle de Launay drank of the well of philosophy and of love; she left none of her virtue within it. She encountered once again her former admirers, the Abbés Vertot and Chaulieu.

Chaulieu, who would have been the foremost of our society poets if he had not also been the most careless, was, despite his eighty years, even more easy-going in his morals than in his verses. A courtier of long standing at Sceaux, he felt himself curbed by the discipline which the Duchess used to maintain in her salons, though he had flirted there to his heart's content, and that for a long time past. Though his eyes were so dim with age that he could scarcely see, he had chosen Madame du Maine for his Muse and Mademoiselle de Launay for his Antigone. To the latter he would make the most extravagant declarations. At the age of seventy-five we find him writing to her as follows: "I adore you, with all your faults and all your charms."

It was in 1722 that Madame du Maine, visited perhaps by some qualms of remorse at having been the means of breaking off her attendant's match with Dacier, exhibited a desire to make amends to her by giving her a suitable position, and one that would permit of her retaining her services and raising her to the rank of a

lady-in-waiting. The Duc du Maine had the command of a Swiss regiment, and it was from that source that the Duchess hoped to discover a rich easy-going officer who would make a suitable husband for the lady-in-waiting of a Royal Princess, and who after the marriage would be content to leave her in the care of one who had come to find her assistance indispensable. Mademoiselle de Launay was sceptical about the existence of such a wonderful bird. "All the thirteen cantons," she humorously wrote, "might be ransacked in vain for a man who could be bribed by a promise of promotion into marrying a woman who had neither birth, money, beauty nor youth to recommend her."

However, the Duchess thought she had found her man in a certain Baron de Staal, a Swiss officer who was professionally ambitious and a widower. She almost thrust him on her protégée, who obeyed without enthusiasm, for she was still nourishing illusions concerning her former lover, the Chevalier du Ménil, and even dared to write to him for advice about the proposed match, secretly hoping, it may be, to rekindle in her faithless lover's bosom the flame of a bygone passion. Somewhat bitterly she wrote :

If you still take any interest in my welfare, I would fain consult you regarding an offer of marriage which I have received, and which seems to present many advantages. In the old days I should not have listened to it, but times have changed, and it seems to me unreasonable to sacrifice one's future to sentiments that have not been requited. . . .

To this du Ménil vouchsafed no reply, and the poor girl had to submit to her fate. The Duc du Maine was bidden by his wife to give the officer a company and Mademoiselle de Launay a pension. So the match was arranged forthwith. As was to be expected, it was not a happy one. Still, it gave the young Baronne a position in the Court of Sceaux.

Being as it were dedicated to the world of fashion, and long since accustomed to society's ways, she continued to reside at Sceaux after her marriage, though in very different circumstances. Henceforth she was present at all the fêtes. If the Duchess was wrong not to forgive her protégée her humble birth, it must be confessed that in a spirit of petty spite Madame de Staal never let slip an occasion of passing an unfavourable verdict on one who had rescued her from drudgery and obscurity.

## CHAPTER XVI

Third period of the life of the Duchesse du Maine—Rambouillet and the new Court of Sceaux—Death of Madame la Princesse (23rd February 1723)—The Marquise du Deffand at Sceaux—The Duchess and the Marquise compared—The Duc's absence from the Coronation of the King (1722)—The Duchess during her nephew's ministry (1726)—Attempt to restore the fortunes of the du Maines (1732)—The Duc's laborious existence at Sceaux.

“ **A** H, 'tis harder than I thought to rouse the world to action.” Such, we are told, were the words of philosophic resignation of which the Duchess delivered herself when she returned from exile in 1719. Authentic or apocryphal, they sum up all the disappointments, all the shattered hopes of this frivolous but ambitious princess. Without counting the cost, she had flung herself into the flames of revolution, but she had burnt her wings and fallen heavily earthwards. Well it was for her that the luxurious carpets of her palace were there to break her fall. With her she brought again to Sceaux the elegance, the distinction, and the gaiety that constituted the slightly artificial charm of those eighteenth-century shepherdesses that people the canvasses of Mignard and Boucher. There, once again, she was to find that society of distinguished men and women in whom the grace and brilliance of the genius of France became for a while incarnate, and who lent it wings to win its airy way across the world. She was about to enter upon the second phase of that singular existence which Sainte-Beuve calls “a life between two bowers.”



True, a year of prison had intervened, a year of memories too harrowing for her thoughts to dwell upon, but though ever and anon that dreadful experience might be spoken of with bated breath and little shudderings of retrospective terror, the rule was never to refer to it above a whisper.<sup>1</sup> Better far it was to enjoy to the full those regions of enchantment, the palace, the parterres, the majestic sheets of water, the statues, the trees beneath whose immemorial shade the Grand Monarque had moved in stately dance and Lulli had wielded the maëstro's baton, the Pavillon de l'Aurore which had beheld so many sumptuous revels, and which even now, amid all its decay, serves to epitomise with its light and airy symmetry, its stone carvings by Puget, and its dome adorned with frescoes by Lebrun, the architectural glories of the "Grand Siècle," and stands a mute remembrancer of those vanished days of splendour.

The Duchess was constrained to bid farewell to her hopes, her dreams of high ambition, wherein she saw the Regency glittering near at hand, and thought to seize it, and descried, perchance, far off on the misty horizon of the years the Crown of France itself. Nevertheless, after her fall she lost nothing of her pride of station, of her confidence in herself, of her passion for rank and honours. But necessity is a harsh mistress. Once back again in her own little world she returned to her earlier manner, and remained queen of those realms of faërie till her seventy-fifth year, being in her own eyes ever the same youthful shepherdess—nay, almost a divinity—for the fauns and dryads who were to people them till the end.

There is a charm that cannot be gainsaid about a home of wit and letters. Courtiers have abundant time on their hands, and the exercise of the mental faculties

<sup>1</sup> People returned but very slowly; at first "very few visited the Princess." "Journal de Buvat," vol. ii., p. 3.

is one of the best means of keeping ennui at bay. At this time there existed two salons especially distinguished by the wit and elegance of their habitués. The one was the salon of the Duchesse du Maine, and the other that of her sister-in-law, the Comtesse de Toulouse, née Marquise de Gondrin. The Court of Rambouillet had always held aloof from political intrigue, and the young King preferred it above all its rivals. Mademoiselle de Charolais, the eldest and most beautiful of the Duc de Bourbon's sisters, then attached to the suite of the Comtesse de Toulouse, was also an attraction. The King, a frequent visitor, found distraction in the gaiety and unaffected wit which marked its frequenters. Widely different was the Court of Sceaux. The Palace of Fays had become an Atheneum of "beaux esprits." There the elegance of the grand seigneur lent a charm to the learning of the savant and of the professional man of letters. After the manner of the Prince de Conti and the Duc de Vendôme, Madame du Maine once more made it her task to patronise the one and the other, to establish a sort of equality between them, to create as it were an aristocracy of birth and intellect, to renew the era of pleasures of the mind, pleasures which savoured somewhat of the ultra-precious school perhaps, but still quite in keeping with the spirit of the age, and well suited to the taste of courtiers who loved to versify their homage. No sooner was she home again than she, their Muse, pictures a child coming into Chaulieu's room and saying, "Brothers, arise, for the Loves of Sceaux have awakened again. Some time ago a wise fairy who looks after them, seeing that they had no further employment at Sceaux, and that they were not in the humour to take service elsewhere, laid them asleep amid the flowers, the grasses, and the shady places where they had been wont to dwell. Said this fairy to them :



*Anne de Baviere* Duchesse d'Enguien  
fille de feu. Mon<sup>seigneur</sup> Edouard de Baviere, Comte Palatin du Rhin  
et de. Madame Anne de Gonzague, Princesse de Mantoue Na  
quit le 13<sup>e</sup> Mars 1629. et a este marie avec. Mon<sup>seigneur</sup> Henry-Jul de  
Bourbon Duc d'Enguien le 1<sup>er</sup> decembre 1663.

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à Paris chez la Citoyenne Moncassin Rue d'Anjou le 1<sup>er</sup> d'Avril 1733.

ANNE OF BAVARIA, DUCHESSE D'ENGHIEN, MOTHER OF THE DUCHESSE  
DU MAINE



Réveillez-vous, troupe légère,  
 Vos maux cessent, ouvrez les yeux ;  
 Courez embrasser votre mère ;  
 Du Maine revient dans ces lieux.  
 Trop longtemps votre sommeil dure,  
 Regagnez tant d'instants perdus ;  
 Faites blessure sur blessure  
 Aux cœurs qui croyaient n'aimer plus.<sup>1</sup>

“ The Loves did not need twice telling ; with one accord they rallied round their Sovereign.”

The “ galleys of wit ” began again their course at Sceaux ; they were but little affected by the death of Madame du Maine’s mother, which occurred at the Petit-Luxembourg on the 23<sup>rd</sup> February 1723. Madame la Duchesse was seventy-five years of age, and all that was mortal of her was laid to rest in the Carmelite Nunnery in the Rue Saint-Jacques. Forty-five years of her life she had passed beneath the yoke of a hateful consort. Her only son she had lost while he was yet a boy, and her daughters had brought her but little comfort.

And now behold another figure enters these intellectual lists at Sceaux, to wit, Charles Jean François Hénault. Honorary President of the Parliament of Paris, an academician twice over, and “ an interesting type <sup>2</sup> of that constellation of cultured and literary men of the world among whom the names of the Prince de Ligne, the Duc de Nivernais, the Chevalier de Boufflers, the Marquis de Saint-Lambert most readily occur.” People used to call him the President in Ordinary to the Duchesse du Maine. He confesses in his Memoirs how sick he used sometimes to be of the hollow and futile devices that

<sup>1</sup> Awake once more, ye lightsome band, your ills are past. Come, open your eyes ; hasten to kiss your mother, who has come home once more. Too long your slumbers have endured ; recover all the time that you have lost, and with shaft after shaft pierce those hearts that never thought to love again.

<sup>2</sup> Lucien Pérey, “ Le Président Hénault.”

had to be gone through to keep up the play of wit at the Duchess's. She led the conversation with a consummate skill born of long experience, but her associates did not invariably possess her unflinching inspiration, her gift of imperturbable repartee. Though President Hénault pays due tribute to the intellectual qualities of the Duchess, he asks pardon of the gods for the trash she made him mouth and the rubbishy versicles he composed at her command during the thirty years he was an habitu  at Sceaux. Madame du Maine, however, did not monopolise him altogether. He had been introduced to her about 1720, and had rapidly been placed on a privileged footing at Sceaux, and maintained it till Sceaux gave place to Anet. At the same time he was to be seen at the Court of the Regent, which was then in its palmiest days. "I was," he says, "a member of both schools; in the morning I would lay down the law, in the evening I used to sing." In matters of gallantry he condescended to share his favours between the Duchess and the Marquise. The Marquise in question was Madame du Deffand, one of the new recruits at the Court of Sceaux, and possibly the most brilliant of them all; a pre-eminence she owed to her charms, her wit, and a hint of moral obliquity which added a certain piquancy to her attractions. As she advanced in years, Madame du Maine became less of a stickler in the matter of propriety, a fact to which Madame du Deffand and Madame du Ch telet both bear witness. H nault betrayed a particular predilection for the Marquise, whose affections, unless the *chronique scandaleuse* of the day does her an injustice, were not invariably of the Platonic order.

In 1729, it befel that Madame H nault, who appears to have entered but little into the existence of the President, quitted this mortal scene. Madame du Deffand deemed that it behoved her to console the widower in his bereavement, and had recourse to Madame de Staal's

good graces to put them in each other's way. The Marquise, who was separated from her husband, was only too anxious to lighten the burden of her "widowhood." She was a "bel esprit" of the new school, "with much less affectation than Madame du Maine and a cordial detestation of anything that savoured of pretence or artificiality."<sup>1</sup>

In common with the Queen of Sceaux, she was of a more or less exacting disposition, but the difference in their rank necessarily had a somewhat controlling influence on the Marquise. Nevertheless peace was only maintained at the price of generous concessions on either side. Madame du Maine displayed much indulgence towards her friend, not so much, it may be, for the pleasure of enjoying the wit of the Marquise as for the satisfaction of showing off her own. "I love society," she used to say with the simplicity of the true autocrat, "everybody listens to me, and I listen to nobody." At length the Order of the Honey Bee was bestowed with great solemnity on Madame du Deffand. We may imagine how the latter must have laughed at such childishness.

The Duchess was ever a prolific writer. So, too, was the Marquise. Next to Voltaire she probably wrote the purest prose of her time. This society of preciosity and banter must needs have its butts, its laughing-stocks, and it was chiefly Madame Dreuillet<sup>2</sup> who drew upon herself the winged shafts of the jesters. She was the widow of a chief justiciar in the Parliament of Toulouse,

<sup>1</sup> Maugras, "les Choiseul" (Letter from Madame de Choiseul).

<sup>2</sup> The wife of President Dreuillet was a southerner full of imagination. She had an originality about her that afforded a piquant contrast to the pervading uniformity of style and accent; nor did she hesitate to give play to her tongue. She it was who declared with more wit than propriety that "the best way to put an end to temptation is to give way to it." (Mme. du Noyer, "Lettres historiques et galantes," Amsterdam, 1720, vol. ii., p. 205. Quoted by M. de Lescure, "Correspondance de Mme. du Deffand.")

and one of the Duchesse du Maine's new friends. She enlivened their gatherings by singing them songs which, proceeding from a woman of sixty, were possibly a little youthful in tone. At table she would be loaded with ironical compliments, and she was given to understand that what she did and what she wrote would have made anyone proud. One evening, when supper was in progress at the Arsenal, in the pretty little summer-house the Duchess had built on the banks of the Seine, Madame du Maine requested Madame Dreuillet to sing. She was usually asked to perform during dessert, but on this occasion the invitation came with the soup. It happened that Madame Dreuillet was slightly indisposed, and Hénault whispered to the Duchess that as they would be four or five hours at table, the poor woman would never be able to keep going until the end. Fontenelle, who was also one of the guests, asked that she should be let off. "Now, Messieurs, hold your tongues," exclaims Madame du Maine, to the amazement of the company, "don't you see the woman may be dead before the roast comes on?" The jest was a brutal one, but the Queen of Sceaux was always sure of her meed of applause. "I was struck," says Hénault in relating this anecdote, "with the interest that princesses take in the members of their entourage."

The secret of Madame du Maine's superiority, the guarantee of her ascendancy, was that she was a princess to the finger tips, and that she illumined everything with her wit. Even in her bursts of passion she did not forget that she was a patrician, and everyone was conscious of her prestige.

In 1728, Père Buffier, a Jesuit, presented a philosophic and poetic treatise to the Queen of Sceaux, with the following dedicatory epistle:

Your Palace, Madame, is that of Minerva and the Muses. Nothing in literature is a closed book to you, nothing comes



to you amiss. What fire is yours, what skill, what charm of fancy, what purity of expression! These qualities it is that bring to your court so many men distinguished by their genius and learning, and kindle the desire for literary perfection in the hearts of so many others.

Making every allowance for a courtier's exaggeration, there was a sufficient residuum of merit at Sceaux to adorn the *Temple du Gout*. Père Buffier's dedication merely forced the note a little. And she was still Minerva! It must be confessed, however, that it was not the Goddess of Wisdom who set the Cellamare plot in motion.

Amid the revival of the fêtes of Sceaux there was no trace of the family misfortunes save the loss of the princely rank for the Duc and his sons. Monsieur du Maine was not restored to his former position till the time of Cardinal Fleury's ministry.<sup>1</sup> He therefore took good care not to be present when the King was crowned at Rheims in 1722. He, a mere ordinary peer, would have cut a melancholy figure face to face with the Regent and the five princes of the blood. Profiting by the harsh lessons of adversity, Monsieur du Maine was very cautious in his relations with the Regent. When Louis XV. attained his majority he certainly restored their titles to the bastard princes, but not the right of succession to the Crown which had led the Queen of Sceaux into committing so many foolish acts. Her children were henceforth to enjoy such prerogatives as had formerly been granted to the Duc de Vendôme, but they were to cease at their death. In 1726 the Duchess was to have the galling spectacle of seeing her nephew and quondam persecutor, the Duc de Bourbon, at the head of the ministry. But she did not quit her retreat, either to offer battle to him or to harness herself to his chariot. She simply held

<sup>1</sup> On the 21st June 1721, the Duc du Maine was accorded the right to re-enter the Arsenal. "Journal de Buvat," vol. ii., p. 3.

aloof, and no reconciliation was ever fated to take place. The wrong had been too flagrant.

At the Palais-Royal everything grated on the Duc du Maine; the Regent's debaucheries, the reckless waste of the comptrollers-general and the wild pranks of the young King. Nevertheless, he was obliged to do violence to his conscience and remain silent in the face of it all. In the minds of the princes of the blood suspicion still clung to him as the chief of the revolutionary cabal, as an inveterate conspirator, and an impenitent intriguer. But it was not for nothing that he had been brought up by Madame de Maintenon, and he continued to hold the straight path, heedless of Saint-Simon's sarcasms and the shafts of the Regent's intimates which fell like rain about him. Some ill-natured wags spread about copies of a "Treatise on Patience, Christian and Political, by Monsieur le Duc du Maine." It touched the sensitive chord. Occasionally, too, the husband's temper was sorely tried by his wife. Still, in their political eclipse, the bastard princes did not fail to meet with unwise counsellors, dangerous friends ready to breathe upon the spent ashes of their ambition, to make them hold high their heads once more as though their cause were not irremediably ruined. In the salons of Sceaux, courtiers were found shortsighted or selfish enough to whisper wild counsels in the Duchess's ear, telling her that she ought again to take the field and offer battle to the legitimate princes of the blood.

The Duc du Maine turned a deaf ear to the calls of ambition, even when they were reinforced by flattery. His days at Sceaux were industrious and tranquil, and he derived a peaceful enjoyment in watching over his sons as they grew up into manhood. Their mother, careless of their education—such preoccupations would have been a serious drag on her pleasures—had for a long time kept them out of her way. They had spent

their childhood in the Petit Château, a separate building situated at the entrance to the park. Their chief interests and energies were absorbed in physical exercises, and till the time came when they would be called upon to take up arms, they devoted themselves to the chase and other sports in fashion at the period. They preferred the joys of open-air life to the pleasures of the mind—the maternal enthusiasms had rather disgusted them with the latter.

Mademoiselle du Maine had left her convent. She lived withdrawn in a corner of the palace, caring little for society or intellectual pursuits, and taking, apparently, a view of life diametrically opposed to her mother's. History has nothing of note to record of her.

The Duc du Maine showered benefits on his country neighbours, and, thanks to his good works, acquired among the peasants a worthier and a firmer popularity than courts can give. The inhabitants of Sceaux were assiduous in their homage to the Princes, availed themselves freely of the palace grounds, and took great interest in everything that concerned the family. The reputation of the Duchess was high for virtue and kind deeds. The people around showed sorrow at their fall, and there are facts which prove the genuineness of their vassals' loyalty.

## CHAPTER XVII

The Duchess in her fiftieth year—Malézieu growing old—The Marquise de Lambert—Lamotte-Houdart—Mademoiselle de Launay and the letters of the Duchess—Madame du Maine and Lamotte: their *correspondance galante* (August-November 1746)—The Duchess as a versifier.

**I**N 1726 Madame du Maine was approaching her fiftieth year. She was still youthful in appearance, still a coquette. Her dress was invariably distinguished by a studied refinement, and was always in the latest fashion. "Quick and vivacious in her movements, most elegant in her manner and bearing, with a singularly attractive way of talking," she was far from growing weary of practising the art to please. Loth to relinquish the sovereignty that had been hers in her younger days, she loved to feel that men's hearts throbbed more quickly at her approach, and sought in gallantry consolation for the blow that had been dealt at her prestige. Malézieu, the very first among her vassals to be chained to the "galley of wit," was beginning to feel the weight of his years. His rhymes had grown less warm with the sacred fire than of old; they were couched in less gladsome strains. Sending a vase of gillyflowers to his liege lady one day, he accompanied the offering with some verses in which he bewailed the weakness that was coming upon him, and sang mournfully of the approaching end of his days, adding withal that as his verses were addressed to his "adorable princess," they were assured of immortality. Like the good courtier that he was, he pretended

to ascribe whatever renown was his "to the deathless deeds" of the Duchess, and the virtues of *Ludovise* were still the burden of his song. But, alas, his dithyrambs were now somewhat coldly received; the Duchess began to long for a different devotee. Insatiable of flattery as ever, she pounced upon another victim, and so exacting did she become that he had to seek refuge again in the celebrated Tuesday gatherings at Madame de Lambert's whence for a time he had transferred his allegiance to Sceaux. Of these "Tuesdays" the Duchess was not a little jealous.

The Marquise de Lambert, though very advanced in years, continued to gather round her some of the choicest spirits of the age. Lamotte-Houdart, Mairan, the Abbé Mongault and Fontenelle, the very flower of the Académie Française, divided their attentions between her salon and that of the Duchess at Sceaux. Mademoiselle de Launay frequently went to the Hôtel Lambert with messages from her mistress to the Marquise. Fontenelle observes that Madame de Lambert was among the very few women of her time who had held aloof from the gambling fever; and in this matter the atmosphere of her salon was superior to that of Sceaux. It was beneath her ægis that Lamotte had perfected his powers. Madame du Maine, to whom he had been presented about the year 1720, had received him as her guest at Sceaux, and gradually taking him under her wing, was now proposing to substitute him for her old factotum, Malézieu, whose star was waning, and whose style was no longer in the mode.

Lamotte-Houdart had already made himself a reputation in literature. Though a poet and a philosopher by inclination, chagrin at the failure of his first comedy, *Les Originiaux*, had sent him, a youthful neophyte, to the monastery of La Trappe. He did not remain there long, and we soon find him again at work, successfully

displaying his versatility in many different kinds of composition. His tragedy, *Inez de Castro*, won him wide popularity, and he came to be much sought after in the salons of the great. He possessed a witty tongue that could be biting or genial by turns. Voltaire, in an epigram which he devotes to Lamotte in his *Temple du Goût*, remarks on the singularity of mind which made him at once a writer of verse and the avowed enemy of poetry.

Gouty and blind, this disciple of Chapelain, this brilliant *causeur* with the mordant pen and the winning manners, used to dine nearly every evening at Madame de Lambert's<sup>1</sup> or at Sceaux. The two *grandes dames* knew his celebrated stanza on the historians by heart, the stanza which ends with the following happy distich :

Contemporains de tous les hommes  
Et citoyens de tous les lieux.

They would send to fetch him by turns, the Marquise in her chaise and the Duchess in her coach.

Madame de Lambert prided herself on attracting to her salon people of rank and fashion rather than professional literary men, deeming that a woman of her station had no business to play the blue-stocking. She herself used to write, but merely for her own amusement.

The principal motive underlying Madame du Maine's correspondence with Lamotte was her great desire to become acquainted with the writings of Madame de Lambert, and to be admitted into the Tuesday gatherings. In their literary duet, the blind poet played the fond admirer, the little Duchess the blushing ingénue.

It chanced that at one of the Marquise's receptions the mistress of the house and Madame de Staal took it into their heads to read out to the company some letters of the Queen of Sceaux. The latter, who was at Eu,

<sup>1</sup> Trublet, "Éloge de Lamotte-Houdart"; Hérissa, "Esprit des poésies de Lamotte"; Sautreau, "Précis sur le poète Lamotte."

learning of the honour that had been done her, seized her pen, and feigning a wrath which was but dissembled delight, wrote off as follows to her confidante :<sup>1</sup>

What is this I hear, my dear Launay? My letters de-claimed to a full Tuesday audience before the Abbé de Bragelonne himself! You and Madame de Lambert are traitors, both of you. Had it only been a question of one of Monsieur *Subtil's* Wednesdays, I should not have cared so much; but to run the gauntlet before Lamotte, Fontenelle, the Abbé Mongault and all the rest of them! I am positively shaking in my shoes. So Monsieur de Lamotte thinks well of my poor prose, does he? Oh, yes, I dare say. . . . You ask me to come back quickly because the plague has broken out in Paris—a tempting suggestion, upon my word! True, you say I should check the spread of the infection, but I do not flatter myself that I am a charm against disease. On the contrary, I am afraid I should but increase the number of cases. Certainly it would never do to be the only survivor, and as I know how to live with my fellow-creatures, I should like to show that I know how to die with them when the time comes. In spite of my nervousness, you see I can be brave when I have to be.

As you are the custodian of all my poor effusions, I should deem that I was depriving you of your rights did I fail to send you a couple of hapless rondeaux that have issued from my sterile brain. If the Tuesday people hear them, it is all over with my reputation for verse as well as prose!

Madame de Staal knew her mistress far too well to interpret her prohibition seriously, and lost no time in making the company acquainted with the Duchess's letter and the two rondeaux. They evoked general applause. Lamotte, who was called upon to return thanks to the author, excused himself on the grounds that it would be such a difficult matter to write anything capable of giving pleasure to a princess whose taste was so refined and whose style so excellent that everyone else's productions were put in the shade. For a long

<sup>1</sup> Eu, the 16th August 1726.

time they endeavoured in vain to persuade him, but yielding at last to Fontenelle's instigations, he wrote her a flattering epistle in the name of the association in general.

And now behold the Duchess en route for home, travelling through Normandy with but one idea in her head, namely, to be admitted to Madame de Lambert's "Tuesdays." On reaching Bizy, near Vernon, she could contain her impatience no longer, and snatching up her pen the last thing at night in a hostelry, she dashed off a letter to Lamotte, in which, after an elaborate apostrophe to the Tuesday assemblies—*O mardy respectable! . . . mardy imposant!* etc. etc.—she proceeded as follows:—

I have received with much pleasure the letter you were so good as to write to me. One thing only is needed to complete my glory, and that is to gain admission to your august senate. Were that privilege vouchsafed to me, I could truly affirm that Tuesday was the proudest day of my life.

This effusion she signed *La Bergère de Madame de Lambert*, and directed it to *Monsieur de Lamotte, secrétaire du mardy*.

To reply to this "precious" effusion—it might have been penned by Mademoiselle de Scudéry herself—none could be found more fitted than Lamotte. "He was never regarded as a man capable of wild flights, whether in matters of poetry or of love."<sup>1</sup> The underlying idea in this gallant but decorous correspondence was to convey to a *Most Serene Highness* the fact that the writer was in love with her, but without ever actually mentioning the word "love," or overstepping the limits of respect, or most important of all—displaying any lack of ardour in his addresses.

I know not, Madame, so his letter ran, by what caprice this assembly has entrusted me with the task of thanking

<sup>1</sup> *Annales poétiques*," article Lamotte, vol. xxxiv.



you for the high esteem in which you hold us. What, Madame! you who, we are told, can enter on the most learned controversies without a tremor, you whom the roar of cannon, the howling of the tempest, nay, even public speeches avail not to daunt, are we to understand that you have been disturbed because Mademoiselle de Launay has read out your letters to us? Still, Madame, it must be confessed that you have some reason to be afraid. Your rank would have availed you little had your letters been found wanting in charm. You have been judged just as though you were plain Mademoiselle Scudéry, and Monsieur Méran, the precise, would have relentlessly proceeded to prove that your gifts were nothing out of the ordinary, had the proposition been a tenable one. But it was not, and, yielding with a good grace, we had to allow that you well deserve to be admitted to our circle. This, however, you will not be, and I bewail your lot. See what it is to be a princess! However, take heart, for your letters, your *rondeaux* will be with us though you are absent. We shall always treat them as worthy associates. Often we shall admire them, albeit sometimes, if the chance but offers, we shall criticise them just to display our independence.

But of a verity, Madame, your protestations do us too much honour. We are not the prodigies of genius that Your Most Serene Highness believes us to be, and I cannot see you labouring under a delusion without doing my best to undeceive you. Know us, then, as we truly are, but whisper it not abroad that I betrayed my fellows, and remember that if I do so, it is but in order to initiate you into the arcana of our cult.

Thereafter Lamotte proceeded rather humorously to give an account of the various personages who frequented these famous Tuesdays.

To begin with Madame de Lambert, our president; you will doubtless have remarked, Madame, that her views are generally in striking contrast to those of her fellow-mortals. What they regard as trifles she considers as highly important, and *vice versa*. Yet she is sometimes weak enough to appear to think as other people. She is horribly careless of her

reputation. You know, of course, that she is supposed to be always thinking about deep things and expressing herself in abstruse language. Well, Madame, I tell you on my honour that she occasionally says things quite plainly, and the loftiest matters she will treat of most simply of all. I will say nothing of her blind faith in human nature; she is imbued with sentiment, friendliness and trust. They have a fine knowledge of the world, people like that. And then they find themselves caught in the trap—which is just what they deserve.

As for Fontenelle, you will not be surprised to hear him described as a truly wonderful man. He has reduced the question of taste to a science, so that when the Athenians are convulsed with laughter and the Romans exclaiming in ecstasy, *he* will be found perfectly unmoved. You are of course aware, Madame, that he has aspired to outdo those great masters in every one of the arts (why shouldn't we think the worst about a man at once—it's really the shortest way to get to the bottom of him). Banter, gallantry, sentiment, philosophy, geometry, he has determined to shine everywhere and in everything, and to demonstrate that there are really no such things as mutually exclusive talents. But take his geometry, for example. He has just written a book of such labyrinthine subtlety, that if he mislays his notes for a month—just a month, mark you—he won't even be able to explain his system to himself, such a sieve-like head has he.

But enough of him; let me come to Méran. Now he is the very embodiment of Reason, the most finished of logic choppers. Make the slightest slip in your argument, and he is down on you at once. Only he prides himself on doing it so nicely, as if it matters *how* you wound one's vanity if you *do* wound it.

As for the Abbé Mongault, he is simply chock full of shocking ideas. He is never weary of maintaining that women are only made for love and pleasure. They have his full permission to do what they will in the kingdom of triviality, but woe betide them if they mix themselves up in matters of graver import. The gods forgive me, Madame, but I do believe it would be some time ere he recognised even your worth.

Madame de Sainte-Aulaire does not even know the meaning of the words "dispute" and "contradiction." What a Tuesday treasure! The only occasions on which she displays any heat are when she is telling you that women have more sense than men, and that Monsieur de Fontenelle is invariably in the right. Two rather ill-assorted propositions.

I will say nothing about Mademoiselle de Launay—you know her. Still, you can see well enough that among the whole collection there is only one of any real worth, and that I am he. As I have the honour to be known to you, it is useless for me to endeavour to hide my light under a bushel. I believe you would find ready admission as a Bergère, but what a mockery that would be! The disguise would only render you the more charming, and us less able to restrain our enthusiasm. Whatever comes of it, I shall never cease to have for you the respect which is your due, and it is with profound consciousness of such a sentiment that I now subscribe myself

Your Most Serene Highness's, etc., etc.

The Duchess made reply :

Far from asking to be admitted into your circle, I shall take very good care not to venture among you, both for Madame de Lambert's sake and my own. I don't know whether I ought to be so very grateful to her for what she has said of me. I should of course feel highly flattered, but on the other hand she makes it impossible for me to praise her judgment, her literary talent, and all those other gifts which I used to belaud so unreservedly.

But the Princess's exclusion was not destined to continue much longer. Shortly afterwards we find Madame de Lambert writing in these terms to Lamotte :

By the way, Monsieur, I have long been wishing to take a revenge on behalf of my sex on your learned men. The Princess will be the coin in which I shall pay you out. You will only grudgingly concede us a little imagination and a gleam or two of wit. I am, then, about to show you a princess who possesses all the talents, a mind that is profound, well-balanced and harmonious, a mind as keen as it is delicate,

and illumined with all the charms of imagination, an engaging poetic fancy and much enthusiasm. That should modify the conceit of our lyrists. In fine, I should present to you in reality that of which Saint Evremond only gave as an adumbration. You imagine that Her Highness will not come to our Tuesdays! But she will, Monsieur, for *our* glory and *your* confusion! What will become of you when you behold a princess whose dignity has even permeated her disposition so that she never allows us to feel her superiority, whence it comes that no one bears her malice for it. Add to this that she possesses all the graces of the shepherdess, the art of conversing with wit and charm, an infectious cheerfulness, a gentle mirth that can turn to seriousness when it will, and what will your respect become?

And Madame de Lambert writes to the Duchess :

Behold, Madame, the worthy Tuesdays render homage to Your Most Serene Highness. The Great Fontenelle, adorned with all the talents, equally at home with the serious and the comic muse, whose reputation is world-wide, the secretary and well-nigh the doyen of the academies, is at your feet.

And she passes in review "the inflexible Lamotte," the "mentor of a great prince" (the Abbé Mongault), "the kindly Abbé de Bragelonne," "the precise Monsieur de Mairan." "All of them take glory in honouring you. Language is perfect only when you speak it or when others are speaking of you."

Behold, then, the august Princess duly received and accredited in a salon very inferior to her own, but one to which her capricious jealousy made her ascribe an inestimable worth. The correspondence with Lamotte thus begun is continued with much delicacy. In a letter dated the 20th September, Madame du Maine jokes about the picture Madame de Lambert had drawn of the Serene Highness, "a portrait," she says, "which I am glad you think I resemble. That being the case, I ought to hold my tongue and allow it to speak for me. I will not tell

you, therefore, that for the first time in her life Madame de Lambert has gone astray, that she has drawn quite an idealised picture, and that all the time when she is reproaching you with having employed your irony upon her she takes her revenge upon you by indulging in the most unlimited exaggeration. I will not tell you that she thoroughly proves the impossibility of reducing taste to a science, since her own has led her so far astray and caused her to imagine things so different from what they really are."

Lamotte on his side protested, and praised more unstintingly than ever "her admirable heart, softer, more compassionate, more generous than any other, and, most important of all, as constant as it was tender." This was gallantry pure and simple, and the gallant did not hesitate to pursue his point.

"Send me, I beseech you," he writes, "another Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon, for I have almost worn away the last, etc. etc."<sup>1</sup>

The little Duchess was by no means coy, and on the 27th September she was letter-writing again. Houdart de Lamotte complained that the Duchess had not signed her last letter, and she replied on the 2nd October as follows :—

I know not by what mischance my name did not appear on the paper I sent you. Certainly I thought I had put it there. Some knavish imp must have spirited it away, or rather some beneficent fairy who desired that I should have the pleasure of hearing from you promptly. You expatiate so gallantly on the effects that a cherished name produces on you that I am not at all sure that I did not gain in not sending what you wanted. However, as I am anxious above everything to keep my word, you will find the name hereon, unless some accident befalls.

<sup>1</sup> Lamotte's meaning, of course, was that he had almost devoured the name with kisses.

But the little Duchess has her qualms of conscience, for on the 6th October she is writing to her aged friend as follows :—

I was very rash to plunge into this correspondence with you ; it is going farther than I thought, and just shows how one may enter on a thing without foreseeing what may come of it. I find it more impossible to write to you than ever. If I want to reply to a gay and witty letter, I am afraid I shall not succeed ; if to a gallant epistle, I shall not know how to set about it—at any rate I shall have to act as if I did not. If I praise your letter as I should like to, people will call me a coquette ; if I don't praise it at all, they will assume that I am devoid of taste or feeling.

Once launched on the River of Dalliance, the two pseudo-lovers drifted on to their hearts' content, and this correspondence is continued through fifteen letters, in which, despite all protestations to the contrary, the mere pleasure of writing is apparent on every page, the pleasure, that is, of writing for an audience. All the Duchess's letters concluded with her three names written in a bold hand—*Louise-Bénédicte de Bourbon*. They may still be seen among the manuscripts of the *Bibliothèque Nationale*. In one of her letters she writes :

As regards the respect of which you speak, I am glad that it is not like everyone else's. Uniformity is tedious in the long run, and you are right in putting a little variety into a feeling which is wearisome enough in itself.

To which Lamotte replied :

The "*Louise Bénédicte de Bourbons*" come to me in pairs, but even so, Madame, I scarcely have sufficient for my needs ; for the first time in my life I understand what avarice and ambition are. One can never have enough of one's heart's desire. But you put an overwhelming price on what costs you little enough. You write three words—three words which I adore 'tis true—but still they are only three words, and in return you demand as many letters as your fancy

prompts. . . . I see in my mind's eye the graces about you coming in relays to dictate your letters, or rather I see that you leave them nothing to do but to smile at your badinage. Of a truth, Madame, that is highly convenient. But with me it is just the opposite. I cannot tell you a quarter of *what* I would, nor can I tell that little *as* I would.

The Duchess bids him write her in verse, saying that a poet has many privileges and can say in verse things that he dare not utter in prose.

As to your reproach, she adds, that I only send you three words that cost me scarcely anything and that I exact payment for them in as many letters as it suits me, do you count as nothing the jealous remonstrances of my swains who claim that these three words have a very deep significance? Everything considered, I put as much at stake as you do, and the "Louise Bénédicte de Bourbons" are not too dearly paid for. Here, then, is one more, and you know that according to our compact it should bring me another letter.

However, the expected verses do not arrive. Houdart de Lamotte prefers to do his trifling in prose. But this did not suit the Queen of Sceaux; she grew displeased and refused her signature.

You tell me when you write that you wish only to think of me, and that if you wrote in verse you would have to give your mind to the work and not to the subject of it. To that I say, *think only of me, but think intently and the poetry will come of itself*. . . . I shall send you no more till you have sent me the verses.

Lamotte grows desperate,

Plus de Louises-Bénédictes !  
Eh ! que vais-je donc devenir ?  
Par quel secours puis-je les obtenir ? <sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> No more Louises-Bénédictes; alas, what then is to become of me? By what means shall I obtain them?

. . . You see, Madame, that I had to stop short there, and that the only way out of the difficulty would have been to call in the aid of the Picts.<sup>1</sup>

To this the Duchess replied with the following distich, in which she makes use of the familiar "tu" and "toi."

Consulte ton respect, écris ce qu'il te dicte,  
Tu rimeras à Bénédicte.<sup>2</sup>

Lamotte continues to withhold his poetry, and at last his tenacious correspondent flies into quite a passion. On the 30th October she wrote telling him that she was not going to ask him for poetry any more, and that it was clear that when Apollo failed to inspire him, he was quite without resource. She concluded by asking him to suppress her letters, and by telling him that she had nothing more to say.

This was war, but it was also victory, and Lamotte yielded himself vanquished to Condé's grand-daughter, although she had laid aside the sword and sceptre for the pastoral crook. Lamotte sent his verses, and though they were somewhat risky in tone, they did not fail to please. The Duchess was silent until after the anniversaries of All Souls and All Saints—it would have ill become her to trifle on matters of doubtful propriety at such a time—and then replied in her liveliest vein in some very skilful lines, in which she compliments Lamotte on the quality of his verses.

There, she adds, that is what I think about your verses. I don't know how in the world the rhymes came to me. At all events the ideas are mine, but for the poetry I don't know to whom I am indebted. The only drawback to your verses is that they were not given willingly, and, say what you will, I suspect that Madame de Lambert had something to do with

<sup>1</sup> *i.e.*, Pictes to rhyme with Bénédictes.

<sup>2</sup> Consult thy respect, write what it dictates, and thou wilt find a rhyme for Bénédicte.



your final surrender. Still, I am glad your last letter did not contain such a profusion of "Serene Highnesses," nor the threat of "irreproachable respect." You certainly deserve to-day a

LOUISE BÉNÉDICTE DE BOURBON.

So there it is. We shall see what else you deserve later on.

The Thursday following she sends him another letter, a very brief one this time, in which she thanks him for a book of his which he had sent her, and in which she had found a charming dedicatory epistle. But the letter which had accompanied the gift did not please her; it was much too serious and full of "respect." On the back of this letter Lamotte has written the following somewhat ill-humoured lines :—

Quand un respect tendre et jaloux  
Ne reçoit pas sa récompense,  
Avec Bergère comme vous  
Le pur respect est la vengeance.<sup>1</sup>

He avenged himself by sending noëls to the Duchess in which he sang of his lady-love to the lilt of "Vous qui désirez sans fin." They began with the following :—

Vous qui désirés scavoir  
Par quel hasard  
L'amour a mis sous son pouvoir  
La Motte-Houdart,  
Ludovise est de l'histoire.  
Or ainsi  
Elle est digne de mémoire  
La voicy.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> When respect that is both tender and jealous receives not its due recompense, with a shepherdess such as you pure respect is the best revenge.

<sup>2</sup> You who are fain to know by what chance Love has enthralled La Motte-Houdart, Ludovise is in the tale. It is therefore worthy of remembrance. Here, then, it is.

“O Molière, le Molière des *Précieuses*,” cries a modern critic,<sup>1</sup> “where wert thou?” Nothing could convey a better idea than the perusal of this correspondence of the trials of those who manned the “galleys of wit” at the little Court of Sceaux.

The Duchess at this point returned to Paris, and, as Lamotte could thus see her every day, the correspondence came to an end.<sup>2</sup> But conversations began again, and there were frequent discussions on literary and scientific questions. The Duchess had written a little work on the “Magic Square.” It is to be regretted on antiquarian, if not on scientific grounds that this production has not been handed down to us. It formed the subject of a learned dissertation between Lamotte and Mairan. Madame du Maine was present and altered her work in accordance with their advice. Lamotte wrote her some verses on the subject. It was to him that she once wittily remarked, “Oh, I should find it much harder to resist other people’s temptations than my own.”

Lamotte belongs to the same literary school as Fontenelle. Though always an ingenious writer, his prose reaches a higher standard than his verse. He was the author of some clever fables, and was able to give a witty turn even to the slightest productions of his pen. Some of the choicest specimens of his style are to be found in his correspondence with Madame du Maine, a literary tournament in which the combatants made the very most of their talents. It was a correspondence, however, that was rather severely judged by their contemporaries and the literary people of the day, who considered it unseemly that two people, no longer in the hey-day of their youth, should be writing love-letters to each other. Lamotte’s feelings for the Duchess have been described by Fontenelle “as a singular kind of love, resembling that which Voiture bore to Mademoiselle de Rambouillet,

<sup>1</sup> Sainte-Beuve, *loc. cit.*

<sup>2</sup> Lamotte died in 1731.

but more utterly devoid of hope if that were possible, and without question infinitely more disproportionate." <sup>1</sup>

As the Duchess began to grow old, she turned, not very whole-heartedly, to religion and set about proselytising her friends. Sainte-Aulaire, in common with the majority of his contemporaries, was a follower of Voltaire. Terrified at the thought of his passing thus into the next world, his shepherdess endeavoured to bring him back to the paths of religion. The only result of the attempt, at least as far as posterity is concerned, was an interchange of rather profane verses. Sainte-Aulaire, impatient of the religious importunities of the Duchess, wrote her as follows :—

En vain vous me prêchez sans cesse  
 Pour me faire aller à confesse  
 Je n'ai rien sur ma conscience.  
 De grâce faites-moi pécher;  
 Après, je ferai pénitence.<sup>2</sup>

To which the Duchess made answer still more frankly :

Si je cédois à ton instance,  
 On te verrait bien empêché  
 Mais plus encore du péché  
 Que de la pénitence.<sup>3</sup>

Nevertheless, she persisted in her attempts to bring him to make a tardy repentance. At length he gave in with a toss of the head, saying, "It is the will of my shepherdess; what is the use of putting her out for such a trifle?" Well may one exclaim, *O tempora! O mores!*

<sup>1</sup> Fontenelle, "Œuvres complètes," Berlin edition, 1818, vol. i., p. 548.

<sup>2</sup> It is in vain that you are forever bidding me confess my misdeeds. I have nothing on my conscience. Pray, then, cause me to sin and I will do penance afterwards.

<sup>3</sup> If I yielded to your entreaty you would certainly be much embarrassed, but by the sin even more than by the penance.

It was Sainte-Aulaire who at the age of ninety replied to the Duchess with an impromptu quatrain that has become famous. It was in the year 1733. Seeing him in a dreamy mood after supper one evening, she said, "Are you thinking of the fair ones of bygone days, Apollo mine?" And as he remained silent, she said again, "I am not asking you your age. Tell me what you are thinking about!" Whereupon the Marquis replied on the spur of the moment with the following madrigal :

La divinité qui s'amuse  
A me demander mon secret  
Si j'étais Apollon, ne serait pas ma muse :  
Elle serait Thétys, et le jour finirait.<sup>1</sup>

Arsène Houssaye, in his *Galerie des portraits du dix-huitième siècle*, avers that Anacreon himself would not have made so witty a reply, and he claims that these lines are immortal. Without essaying to analyse their slightly obscure meaning, we may confess that they touch the very acme of gallantry, and that they are in absolute accord with the fashion of the day. But it was making rather too great a demand on the imagination to compare Madame du Maine to a daughter of Nereus. True, she had been compared over and over again to all the other goddesses. The resources of classical mythology were exhausted. But these comparisons were all the merest "jeux d'esprit." The Duchess's nature predisposed her to gallantry rather than to passion. We may indeed ask whether she was ever genuinely in love. Her amatory outpourings were so gushingly demonstrative that they have every appearance of having been dictated merely by a transient caprice of the imagination. This is also noticeable in her relations with Voltaire, who used to

<sup>1</sup> The goddess who is pleased to ask my secret of me, were I Apollo, would not be my Muse. She would be Thetis and the day would end.

send her letters full of gallant and literary badinage. Here are a few of the complimentary wishes which he addressed to her in 1727, after the deaths of Malézieu and Chaulieu—blows which had fallen in quick succession on the Court of Sceaux.

“ May you live henceforth a life of unbroken happiness, and may the tranquillity of your home at Sceaux never be interrupted save by fresh pleasures. The graces of your own mind can suffice to minister to your happiness.

Dans ses écrits le savant Malézieu  
 Joignit toujours l'utile à l'agréable  
 On admira dans le tendre Chaulieu  
 De ses chansons la grâce inimitable.  
 Il vous fallait les prendre un jour tous deux,  
 Car il n'est rien que le temps ne détruise  
 Mais ce beau dieu qui les arts favorise,  
 De ses présents vous enrichit comme eux,  
 Et tous les deux vivent dans Ludovise.<sup>1</sup>

Malézieu died on the 4th March 1727, and Chaulieu about the same time. The Abbé Genest, President de Mesmes and Lamotte-Houdart disappeared within a few years. Adieu, ye laureates of the Court! Adieu, ye bright jewels of your liege's literary diadem! New recruits had to be sought among the survivors of the ex-court, and no mean lights were they. There were Dadvisart, an ex-magistrate of Toulouse, who had taken part in the conspiracy; President Hénault, the Marquis de Clermont-Chatte, Jean Baptiste Rousseau, when, that is, he could escape from his exile in Switzerland; the Marquis de Lassay, Madame de Charost, the future Duchesse de Luynes, the Marquise de Lambert, President

<sup>1</sup> In his writings the learned Malézieu always united the useful with the pleasing, and in Chaulieu we admired the inimitable grace of his verse. But both of them had to be taken from you, for there is nought that Time does not destroy; nevertheless, the fair god who is the patron of the Arts enriches you with his gifts even as he did them, and both of them live on in Ludovise.

Dreuillets' wife, Madame d'Estaing, the Duchesse de Saint Pierre, and many others. The gathering was complete again, and the cause of wit had no decline to fear. But Sceaux never saw the Duc de Bourbon or any member of the Orleans family—the memories of 1718 were still too poignant.

## CHAPTER XVIII

The Duchesse du Maine's correspondence with Fleury (1726)—Retirement and isolation of the Duc du Maine—An epigram at his expense—How the du Maine children were educated and brought up away from their mother—The Duc du Maine, Grand-Master of Artillery—His literary works—His last illness—His reconciliation *in extremis* with the Duchesse de Bourbon—He dies at sixty (18th May 1736)—A very plain funeral—Verdict on his life—Dithyrambs in his honour—The intermediate rank not granted to his successors—The Duchesse du Maine once more received into favour by Louis XV. (24th February 1737).

**T**HE Court of Sceaux had attained so wide a celebrity that many foreigners of note, among whom were even some crowned heads, manifested a desire to visit it. After the Czar Peter the Great, Stanislas, King of Poland, honoured the Duchess by becoming her guest, and expressed an ardent wish to be included in the number of her "swains." The Duchess granted his request, paying him, we are told, "many witty, learned and graceful compliments."

The enthusiasm with which she played the shepherdess by no means led her to overlook her own interests or those of her family. After the fall of her nephew, the Duc de Bourbon, who had been Louis XV.'s chief minister, she hesitated no longer to importune the government with her grievances, witness the letter, half-complimentary, half-reproachful, which she wrote to Fleury on the 28th August 1726. She was then conscious of having at length got rid not only of the Duc de Bourbon but also of the Duc du Maine's great enemies, the Regent and Dubois, both of whom were dead. To Fleury she complained

that she was the only one among the Princesses of the Blood, wed or unwed, who was not in enjoyment of a pension from the King, and she proceeded to prefer her claim in vigorous terms.

During the previous ministry she had forbidden the Duc du Maine to hold any direct communication with the Duc de Bourbon about the matter, "deeming it unbecoming," she said, "that she should be under any obligation to the man who had brought about the downfall of her family." But her jealousy of the Comtesse de Toulouse, who, in common with all the Princesses of the Blood, was in receipt of a pension of 50,000 livres, made her loudly complain of having been overlooked. "I make no secret of the great pain it has caused me," she says to Fleury, "and I trust that you will do me the justice to believe that my attitude is not dictated by self-interest. But the fact that the other Princesses are treated differently from myself, that I alone am deprived of the favours of the King, added, if I may say so, Monsieur, to your own neglect, has pierced me to the quick."<sup>1</sup> The august petitioner then went on to occupy the minister with the question of her children's status, putting, as ever, rank before monetary considerations. Now that she had less to distract her, she had once more taken up her maternal responsibilities. "You are aware of the cruel situation in which my children are placed. It is a question of injustice, nothing more nor less." The Duc du Maine only claims "the honours of the Court that were conferred by the late King's warrants three years prior to the edicts relating to the succession to the Crown, honours which the Duc de Bourbon had never called in question. These offices were obtained from His late Majesty for my children through the instrumentality of Madame la Princesse and Madame la Duchesse. They were only annulled by the Bed of Justice, and without the Duc de Bourbon so much

<sup>1</sup> "A. E." France (1537-1785).



as making the demand. For a person to be deprived of his lawful rank unless previously brought to trial and found guilty of some heinous crime is utterly without precedent. It is therefore merely the restitution of our just rights that we ask of you." The obliging Fleury lost no time in satisfying the Princess's imperious demands and restored the Duc du Maine and his two sons to the rank and position of Princes of the Blood. Their prerogatives were similar to those formerly enjoyed by the Duc de Vendôme.

The Duchesse du Maine had not exercised a paramount influence in the education of her sons. Their natural endowments as well as their tastes led them to mingle but little in society, and they gave themselves up heart and soul to the pleasures of fishing and the chase. One day when out stag-hunting they plunged into the Marne in pursuit of their quarry and were nearly drowned. A miller and his two sons dashed in to the rescue and brought them to shore more dead than alive. The rescuers received a princely reward, and the incident inspired some anonymous verses on "The Two Beloved Princes," which gave great delight to the readers of the "Tout-Paris" of those days.<sup>1</sup>

Towards the end of his life the Duc du Maine seldom attended the Court, and only left Sceaux when his military duties called him to the Arsenal. He was still Grand Master of Artillery, and his correspondence with Cardinal Fleury shows what great importance he continued to attach to these high functions. In 1734, for example, there was a question regarding the price of some horses that were to be purchased for the service, and the Duc du Maine expressed himself very forcibly to the niggardly

<sup>1</sup> After recounting the incident the rhymist remarked that the inestimable virtue of charity was apparently among the things to be learnt at a mill, adding that if such were the case more than one Bishop in France might well turn miller.

minister who was trying to cut him down to the lowest possible figure. "I have had too much experience," he said, "and I hold the King's interests too deeply at heart to jeopardize the efficiency of the Artillery for the sake of 2700 livres. I think that the way in which I have done the duties that have fallen to my lot and the manner in which I have maintained the efficiency of the corps entitle me to speak freely on this question." In another letter of the 31st January in the same year he displays some annoyance at the mistrust of which he is the object. "People have been trying to suggest to the King that I have mismanaged the Artillery, saying that owing to my fault 40,000 écus have been thrown away. I beg, Monsieur, that you will set the matter in its true light before His Majesty. You are a man of religion, and I count on your doing me this act of justice."<sup>1</sup>

In 1733 and 1734 the Duc du Maine carried on a lengthy correspondence with Marshal de Noailles, who was then in Italy on active service. He requested him to keep a fatherly eye on his sons, who were serving in the Marshal's army. "I should regard it as a favour if you would give them the benefit of your advice sometimes. They will receive counsel of various kinds, and God grant they may know the proper value to attach to it. I also trust, Monsieur, that you will let me hear from time to time how they conduct themselves, for I shall certainly learn nothing from them. Not only do they refrain from writing, but they will allow no one about them to write for them." It does not appear, however, that either the Prince des Dombes or the Comte d'Eu won any particular distinction in the course of the campaign in Italy.

For several years past the Duc du Maine had been devoting his leisure to the translation of Cardinal de Polignac's *Anti-Lucrèce*, but in 1733 his works of piety<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> "A. E." France, No. 549 of the 25th January 1734.

<sup>2</sup> "Mémoires de Luynes," vol. i. p. 75.



LOUIS AUGUSTE DE BOURBON, DUC DU MAINE  
*From the Bibliothèque Nationale*

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and his literary pursuits were interrupted by a serious illness which completely ruined his health and was very soon recognised as incurable. A cancerous growth in the face began to eat away his flesh and disfigure the handsome features he inherited from Madame de Montespan. The disease had been developing for two years, and after a dental operation became increasingly malignant. "The sufferer's days were shortened," says a writer of the period, "by the unlucky use of a certain salve or ointment which had been invented by one Cannette, an officer in the Queen's Household."

The patient's final sufferings did but quicken his religious feelings, and inspired him with a great longing to see harmony restored in his family. During the lawsuit which had been carried on by the Princes of the Blood against the Bastards, both the Duc du Maine and the Comte de Toulouse had originally been greatly hurt by the readiness with which their own sister had allied herself with their adversaries. From that time they had both ceased to hold any communication with her. How the Cellamare conspiracy augmented the misunderstanding, especially as regards the Duc de Bourbon, has already been shown. The Duc de Bourbon was now living in retirement at Chantilly. He never had any intercourse with Sceaux, and was, until the last, kept outside the family circle. As for the Dowager Duchess, the Duc du Maine's religious scruples prompted him to effect a death-bed reconciliation with her. When he felt his end approaching, he sent his confessor to ask her pardon for the ill he had done her in days gone by, saying that for his part he had forgotten all his grievances. Touched by this unlooked-for advance, Madame la Duchesse at once expressed a desire to see her brother, but unhappily the critical state of the patient, who had grown suddenly worse, did not permit him to receive her, or, indeed, any other of his relations. He was thoroughly prepared for

death, and had made a will by which he left the Principality of Dombes to his elder son, who already bore the title. He had sent a message to the King resigning his Colonelcy-in-Chief of the Royal Carabiniers, a command which, together with that of the Swiss Regiments and the Governorship of Languedoc, passed to his elder son.

Madame du Maine, to her honour be it said, never neglected to discharge with wifely devotion the duties which her husband's repulsive malady imposed upon her. For a whole year she was in constant attendance upon the sick man, faithfully ministering to his needs, and thus obliterating the memory of the unkindness she had but too frequently displayed towards him in the course of their wedded life. It was in his wife's arms that the Duc du Maine breathed his last. He died the death of a Christian on the 18th May 1736, fortified by all the rites of the Church. At his bedside were gathered the Marquis de Castellane, his Chamberlain, Monsieur de Montmorant, his chief equerry, and Auguste des Mazis, Captain of the Guards. He had just entered upon his sixty-seventh year. The King, his grand-nephew, went into mourning for three weeks, and granted a pension to the widow as well as to her daughter Mademoiselle du Maine.<sup>1</sup>

In accordance with his dying wish, he was laid to rest very simply in the chancel of the Parish Church at Sceaux. Only a few personal friends, artists, men of letters, and some of the neighbouring tenantry took part in the ceremony. His painful illness had made but little impression on the public. No bulletins had been circulated in Paris, and people in general heard of his death with indifference. This bastard offspring of the Grand Monarch, this ex-pupil of Madame de Maintenon, for years past had seldom appeared at Court or in the capital, and had been lost sight of by the courtiers of Versailles and the people of Paris. In the world of politics he was

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires du duc de Luynes," *Gazette de France*.

regarded as a spent force, a power that had had his day, and as such was rewarded with swift oblivion. Looking back over his career, people recognised that he had been the figure-head and the victim rather than the prime mover in the famous quarrel between the Bastards and the Princes of the Blood.

Saint-Simon had the decency to still his railing tongue when his enemy, whose frustrated career evokes our pity rather than our censure, was lying dead. Like so many of the great in this sublunary sphere his memory was variously commented upon by the world at large. While on the one hand his admirers praised him as a man of culture, a charming writer and a modest but witty conversationalist, his detractors drew uncharitable pictures "of the Queen at the head of the table and the Queen's husband at the bottom," like the worthy Monsieur Geoffrin in the *Kingdom of the Rue Saint Honoré*, who, after a few attempts at revolt, settled down into a model of conjugal resignation, finally dying, as he had lived, without anybody being the wiser.

The Duchess, who had sometimes constituted herself her husband's literary Egeria, had but too often proved his evil genius in the world of politics. In his young days the Duc's enemies had been many, but his silence had long since disarmed them.

Were we to base our final judgment of his character on Saint-Simon's exaggerated estimate of his defects—an estimate warped by a ceaseless and virulent animosity—we should behold in him nothing but a mean-spirited, jealous, and cowardly hypocrite. But in point of fact, though the accident of his birth had placed him in a situation superior to that in which royal bastards generally find themselves, he had shown himself worthy of the lofty name and fortune which he owed to his position as a King's favourite. His dignified bearing, his kindness, his generosity won the heart of everyone that was brought

in contact with him. "Duty, in the real sense, had ever been his rule of life,"<sup>1</sup> and Madame de Staal, who had had such long and intimate knowledge of him, affirms that "despite his disgrace he had been very much looked up to by the world at large, not only on account of his personal merits but also by reason of the involuntary respect with which people had always been accustomed to regard him."<sup>2</sup> He had passed his days among a set whose futile pursuits harmonised ill with the austerity of his nature and principles. He would have preferred a different kind of life and, it may be, a different woman for a wife. He was always completely under the Duchess's ascendancy, and recognised her superior powers. Despite the rebuffs which she dealt him, he was entirely devoted to her. She certainly could not have said of him as the Marquise du Deffand had said of her husband—"He does his utmost to annoy." Notwithstanding all his wife's eccentricities of behaviour, he remained her constant friend, even when misfortune overtook them, except for the temporary separation that was occasioned by political differences. According to the manner in which the Duchess brought her influence to bear on his weak character, he oscillated between violence and irresolution. The story of his brief public career shows that he was not of the stuff that soldiers, or statesmen, or aspirants to a throne are made of. It was enough for him that he was a noble prince and a good Christian.

The panegyrics outpoured in his honour in the principality of which his son was chief, referred to the deceased in language of unstinted enthusiasm, while a dedicatory letter addressed to the Sovereign Prince of Dombes a month after Monsieur du Maine's death, spoke in high terms of the example the life of his late father had afforded "of true piety unaffected by worldly splendour; of the

<sup>1</sup> See Buffier (Dedication, 1728).

<sup>2</sup> "Mémoires de Mme. de Staal."



manner in which he had proved that the loftiest of ranks is not necessarily inconsistent with a simple faith in the Gospel." The writer proceeded to pronounce a flattering eulogy on the assistance the government had derived from his sagacious counsels, on the succour he had extended to those in misfortune, and on his signal services as a patron of learning.<sup>1</sup> Speaking of the surviving members of the family, a still richer vocabulary was employed. Reference was made to the son nurtured in the bosom of the Muses, in the sanctuary of Literature, beneath the eyes of a mother whom the learned Greeks would have regarded as Minerva, uniting as she did in her own person and shedding over all her court the enlightenment, the urbanity, the exquisite taste of Athens and of Rome.

The Duc du Maine at his death left behind him debts amounting to three and a half million francs, debts which were due to the lavish scale on which his wife had entertained. By his will, which evidenced the bitterness he felt towards her for the ruin she had caused, he only allotted the Duchess an annuity to be provided out of the revenues of the Principality of Dombes.

The legitimated section made a united effort to procure the intermediate rank for the issue of the Prince des Dombes, the Comte d'Eu, and the Duc de Penthièvre, the son of the Comte de Toulouse, who only survived his brother eighteen months.<sup>2</sup> The Princes and Princesses of the Blood all gave their consent save Madame la Duchesse, Monsieur le Duc, and Mademoiselle de Clermont. Monsieur le Duc displayed particular antagonism, and it was through him that the negotiations came to nought, whereat Madame du Maine's ancient hostility to the members of her own family burst forth anew. At the Court she was once more in favour. The King had allotted her the suite of apartments which the Dowager Princess

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Trévoux."

<sup>2</sup> 1st December 1737.

de Conti had formerly occupied in his palace, and which were now vacant in consequence of her death.<sup>1</sup> Madame du Maine appeared greatly to appreciate this favour. On the 24th February 1737 she had gone with her daughter to visit the King at Versailles for the first time since her husband's death. She was in deep mourning, not only for her husband but also for her brother-in-law the Marquis de Lassay, who had married Madame la Duchesse, the widow of Louis III., Duc de Bourbon-Condé. The visit was brief and strictly formal; the past had not yet been wholly forgotten. But the King, in granting her apartments in his palace, finally removed these remnants of constraint. A letter to Fleury, dated the 20th May 1737, shows the gratitude she felt.

These quarters, she says, will be much more pleasant for me than my previous ones, but what touches me more than anything else is the King's kindness. I shall hasten to offer him my most humble thanks as soon as he returns from Rambouillet. Meanwhile, Monsieur, pray convey to His Majesty my most respectful sense of his generosity, and, for yourself, be assured that no one could more fully appreciate these marks of your good-will than I, a good-will which I entirely reciprocate. LOUISE BÉNÉDICTE DE BOURBON.

There were some kitchens attached to my former suite of rooms, and I should be much obliged if you would obtain me permission from His Majesty to avail myself of those which belong to the apartments of the Princesse de Conti.<sup>2</sup>

Madame du Maine was to survive her husband seventeen years, and the last phase of her existence is not without its curious and interesting characteristics; for the Queen of Sceaux, after her husband's death, still remained a literary centre, continuing to lead the way in intellectual

<sup>1</sup> "A. E." France, vol. cxli., fo. 107.

<sup>2</sup> On Maundy Thursday, at the King's supper to the poor, the Prince des Dombes and the Comte d'Eu waited table with the Dauphin.

pleasures amid a court frequently renewed and already celebrated.

As has been truly observed at the Académie Française,<sup>1</sup> the history of ideas is often inseparable from the history of the salons; salons where the Salic law is unknown and where power is inherited—by women!

<sup>1</sup> Monsieur Vandal in his reply to the Marquis de Ségur.

## CHAPTER XIX

The Duchesse du Maine a widow—Her correspondence with President Hénault—Origin of the principality of Anet—Account of the Château d'Anet—The *habitués* of Sceaux and Anet about the year 1740—The Prince des Dombes and the Comte d'Eu on campaign (1741-1743)—Death of Mademoiselle du Maine (17th June 1743)—Gambling at Sceaux—More versicles—Death of Sainte-Aulaire (20th December 1742)—Voltaire again (1746)—He loses at cards with Madame du Châtelet—His secluded life with the Duchess at Sceaux—His secret productions—The portraits—Reading aloud—Voltaire's trick upon his publishers—Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet at Sceaux and Anet—Representation of *l'Échange*.

**I**F we may hold it a divine mercy to be spared the anguish of some shattering grief, it is, none the less, the punishment of the vain and frivolous that sorrow, when it comes, touches them so lightly that it passes away and leaves no lasting trace upon their hearts; for it is only by sorrow, the sad discipline to which we all submit who truly mourn the passing of those who are to us most dear, that our own souls are uplifted and our own hearts made clean.

The death of the Duc du Maine in 1736, the death of Mademoiselle du Maine in 1743, appear to have had but little effect on the life of the Duchess. Her sons were soon to join the army and to take part with distinction in the war of the Austrian Succession. The Duchess remained at Sceaux in the midst of her court, too easily consoled for the loss of those who were near to her, and never knowing what it was to be lonely, since her courtiers were to be around her for many years to come. The story of the rest of her days, now that she was cut off from politics and public life, is but the record of her literary and worldly

distractions, merely the tale of her youth told over again. If there was any change in her at all it was perhaps that the growing years had made her just a shade less frolicsome, a shade less extravagant. The Queen of Sceaux bore her crosses, if not with indifference, at least with the philosophy of a true Cartesian. A year of mourning sufficed for her, and during that time she consoled herself for the interruption of her fêtes by the increased energy with which she corresponded with her absent friends. In 1737 she went to Dieppe for a course of sea-bathing, and recorded her impressions in some rather amusing letters to President Hénault, written clearly enough for the mere pleasure of writing. They have already been given to the public.<sup>1</sup> In them Madame du Maine is quite herself again, and we find the same spirit, the same sparkle, the same preciosity as we encountered in her correspondence with Houdart de Lamotte. On the beach at Dieppe she "discovered" the ocean, which sounds a somewhat ingenuous announcement to the modern ear.

"President," she wrote, "I have seen the sea, and what is worse I came to see it. I confess I have not embarked upon it—exploits like that I leave to those daring Amazons d'Estrées and Chambonas. It is quite enough for me to enjoy the sea on *terra firma* and to go on to the jetties and watch the tides as they ebb and flow. That is all I want." (The welter of waters daunted her more easily than the welter of politics.) "Ah! what trials I have endured since I left my village" (she might have said her sheepfold). "It has been like passing from the Golden to the Iron Age. Instead of my shepherdess's pipe, my tuneful reed to which (like Madame Deshoulières) I have been long accustomed, I have in my ears the din of drums and trumpets. Instead of the peaceful dances of our rustic swains beneath the shadow of the elms, I am offered the

<sup>1</sup> Lucien Pérey, "Correspondance de Mme. du Deffand et du président Hénault."

spectacle of bursting bombshells and battling frigates. Finally, instead of coronals of flowers, of garlands and ditties sung in my honour, I am saluted with the noise of booming cannon." (This ought not to have displeased the Great Condé's grand-daughter.) She affirms to her beloved President that he would find it just as difficult as she to grow used to such formidable marks of respect. She is most impatient to see her household gods once more. She would not barter the least of her flock "for Neptune and his brood, nor her swains for Proteus and the Tritons."

"My table is furnished with monsters of the deep, and what time Mesdames d'Estrées and Chambonas valiantly attack a sturgeon bigger than myself, I, looking on in fear and trembling, am modestly content with a puny prawn. I fancy the people here think me very different from 'la grande Mademoiselle,' who was a virago and blenched at nothing. But what is one to do? We cannot change our nature, we cannot, as the Scriptures say, add a cubit to our stature, nor can we make ourselves brave when God has made us cowards; am I not right, Monsieur le Président? You, for example, I am sure, know well enough that it is not in your power to become a man of system and method. With that I will bring my letter to a close or you may find it too long for your taste."

Still mythology, nothing but mythology! Neptune, Proteus, and the Tritons—they are all there. And this other letter, so lively, so piquant in its preciousness, which she also sent to Hénault from Dieppe, might it not have proceeded from the pen of Mademoiselle de Scudéry herself?

Ah! write me no more if you wish that I should write to you! It is very easy for me to abuse you when there is any fault to find, but when you send me letters surpassing those of Voiture it is very difficult for me to answer you. Take pity on me since I can but count on two poor swains who, as you say, have no claims above the ordinary. The appetites of Mesdames d'Estrées and de Chambonas are as great as ever, and would form but a hackneyed topic.

To tell you that one of my swains does more noise-making than work and that from the other one gets neither noise nor work, would be to tell you what you know already. To praise your letters as they deserve would be too trite, besides, no small compliment is implied in leaving them unanswered. However, you must not interpret this new reproach of mine too literally, for after all I would rather you wrote me letters that err by excess of beauty than that you should give me another cause for complaint; to prove it, let me tell you that I am wroth that the romance you have begun should come to a standstill when it was making such good progress. You are like *Voiture*, whose *Alcidalis* left off at the most interesting point.

No, I shall not go through Meulan: perhaps you knew it, and that was why you told me you would come there. I should be loth to believe it, my dear President, for it would be horrible that one who can behave so well when he wishes should take a delight in behaving ill.

President Hénault's replies do not appear to have been handed down to us. This is to be regretted, for we should have been treated to a fine piece of literary tilting. Subsequently, the Duchess invited the President to stay at Anet for a while, and sent him a *rondeau* in the style of Ronsard, an offspring of her sterile brain, as with affected modesty she was pleased to put it. She never missed a chance of showing off her style. A dispute cropped up between Hénault and the aged Sainte-Aulaire, and the Duchess must of course intervene. This time it is something after the manner of Molière or Madame de Sévigné, for she has more than one model at her command, and avails herself of any school she chooses. To the President she writes—

“Auteurs vivaient en paix . . . une rime survint,  
Et voilà la guerre allumée.”<sup>1</sup>

“How now, Monsieur le Président? Monsieur de Sainte-Aulaire? *Ma foi*, Messieurs, lay on to your hearts' content so long as I am not your victim. And in

<sup>1</sup> Authors were living in peace . . . a rhyme supervened, and behold, war was kindled!

good sooth the matter concerns me very closely ! Here you write me the most dry-as-dust letter in the world, without so much as a couple of lines of verse in the whole thing, when *I* have been wearing myself out writing prose and verse for your sake. I racked my brain to put together a rondeau for you—whether it be good or bad matters not ; I did my best, and all I get in return is a torrent of unkind things about Monsieur de Sainte-Aulaire. I told him about your complaints, and he answered : ‘ Why does he call me an old troubadour and a no-account knight ? ’ ”

Might this not be the very babble of Vadius and Trisotin ? From one century to another the pedants have changed but little. If they did nothing else they were at least something for Madame du Maine to sharpen her wit upon. Since her disgrace and her widowhood, Sceaux in her eyes had lost something of its prestige, and she had had several residences prepared for her reception, and made use of them by turns.

The Principality of Anet came to her by inheritance from her sister the Duchesse de Vendôme. Louis Joseph, Duc de Vendôme, was the son of Louis de Vendôme and Laura Mancini, and great-grandson, through César de Vendôme, of Henri IV. and Gabrielle d’Estrées. In 1667 Louis Joseph lost his mother. His father, who joined the priesthood, subsequently became Cardinal de Vendôme and died in 1669. But as early as 1667 the Principality of Anet was conferred on Louis Joseph, the conqueror of Villa-Viciosa, who married Mademoiselle d’Enghien and died two years later without issue.<sup>1</sup> Succeeding to her husband’s property, the Duchesse de Vendôme became the owner of Anet by virtue of the provisions of her marriage settlement. At her death in 1718 Madame la Princesse inherited it in her turn, and taking up her

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted for this information to the Comte Guy de Leusse, the present proprietor of the Château d’Anet.



residence at Anet, lived there until her death, and in 1732 the Duchesse du Maine succeeded to it as part of her mother's possessions.

The Château of Anet is a fine structure in the Renaissance style, situate in the Chartres district, not far from Dreux, and sixteen leagues from Paris. It still exists in all its pristine splendour. The King caused it to be built and decorated for Diane de Poitiers by Philibert Delorme, Jean Goujon, and Jean Cousin. Facing the parterres, designed by Lenôtre, were two remarkable arbours called the Trumpets of Anet. At the entrance was a portico in the Doric style with a bronze figure of Diana recumbent and surrounded with emblems of the chase.<sup>1</sup>

Over the attic was a quaint clock in which each hour was represented by stags' feet made of bronze. In the intercolumnar space of the façade were four Virtues in medallion surmounted by the arms of Henri II. and Diane de Poitiers, and everywhere was to be seen the historic crescent. In the guard-room hung an equestrian portrait of the Duc de Vendôme, and the walls of the great drawing-room on the ground floor were adorned with paintings by Audran.

The Duchesse du Maine took great delight in the artistic side of this residence. There, as at Sceaux, she entertained frequently, and on a princely scale. Even in her absence her two palaces gave temporary shelter to the Royal Family. In 1745, Louis XV., unaware that Madame du Maine was from home, went to pass a night at Sceaux on his way to Étampes. Not long afterwards, with the same lack of ceremony, the Queen also journeyed to Sceaux in the Duchess's absence and took with her six Princesses of the Blood. A host of courtiers, men and

<sup>1</sup> The fountain of Diana, in white marble, by Jean Goujon, which used to be so much admired at Anet, is at present in the Louvre. The monumental entrance-gate to the Château has been brought to Paris, and adorns the court of the École des Beaux Arts.

women, came to pay their respects to her there. She occupied the Duchess's bedroom, and took her meals in the hall that had formerly been the theatre.

These unannounced visits might perhaps be taken as indicating a considerable degree of intimacy between the Duchess and the Royal Family. In point of fact, Madame du Maine went seldom to Court, and Louis XV. was a much less frequent visitor at Sceaux than Louis XIV. had been. The Duchess used to look down on Madame de Pompadour, whose superior she deemed herself in everything, to say nothing of lineage. At Anet, as at Sceaux, she surrounded herself with wits. Voltaire, who possessed unlimited self-confidence, once made mention to Louis XV. of his absurd desire of becoming a chamberlain and of wearing a cross and enjoying the privilege of supping with the King. "It is not the fashion in France," was the Monarch's cold reply, "and as there are more wits and noble lords in France than in Prussia, I should require a very large table to seat them all." And he counted them on his fingers: "Maupertuis, Fontenelle, Lamotte, Voltaire, Piron, Destouches, Montesquieu, Cardinal de Polignac, D'Alembert, Crébillon, La Chaussée, Crébillon the younger, the Abbé Prévost, the Abbé d'Olivet."<sup>1</sup> "Well then," added Louis, "for twenty-five years past the whole set would have been dining or supping with me!"

The "whole set" practically represented the Court of Sceaux, whose leading lights in 1740 were Fontenelle and Hénault. Among the women the Marquise du Deffand led the van with Mademoiselle de Launay, now, by her mistress's good pleasure, the Baronne de Staal, but still as charming and as interesting as when she was a lady's-maid.

These later courtiers of the Fair Ludovise passed their time pleasantly enough. The delights of the table were theirs, the charms of conversation, excursions on the

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Mme. du Hausset," Paris, 1824.

lake, dalliyings beneath the venerable trees, which flung their shade over groups of gay and careless revellers listening to some diverting story, after the manner of the characters in the Decameron.

All the nobility of France were serving in the armies during the war of the Austrian Succession. In 1741 the Duchess's two sons departed, without a shadow of regret at leaving her fêtes and her splendours, to join the army in Germany, both with the same rank of Lieutenant-General as their father had borne. Only the elder had seen any service, and that was in Hungary, when he was quite a boy. They were now both nearing forty, without having done any real military work. Nevertheless, they bore themselves honourably in the campaign, fought during two successive years, and were both of them wounded at Doettingen on the 17th June 1743. That was a fateful day for the du Maines. The two brothers recovered from their injuries, but at the very same hour that they fell on the field of battle their sister died suddenly at Anet in her thirty-sixth year. She had never married. Shunning the fêtes of Sceaux with which her mother had satiated her, Mademoiselle du Maine lived but little at home, and spent a part of her sequestered life at the Convent of Maubuisson, near Pontoise, where she had been brought up. Four years before her death, there had been some question of a marriage between her and a young Duc de Guise, "a handsome man of eighteen," that is to say, about fifteen years younger than herself, for she was at that time thirty-two.<sup>1</sup> However, the affair fell through, not apparently on account of the difference in age, awkward though that was, but owing to a failure to agree on the money question, Madame du Maine having stipulated unsuccessfully that her intended son-in-law should bring with him a revenue of 50,000 livres,

<sup>1</sup> She was born in 1707. In 1740 there had also been some talk of marrying her to the Prince of Monaco (Pierre de Ségur, "la Dernière des Condé," p. 175).

which indeed was little enough in comparison with the dowry of the wealthy princess.

“At six in the evening of the 17th June 1743,” we are told by Luynes, “Mademoiselle du Maine was taken ill while out riding. No sooner was she placed in her carriage than she fainted away. She never recovered consciousness, and died a few hours later.” Her remains still repose in the chancel of the Church at Anet, where there is also a beautiful reliquary, the gift of the Duchesse du Maine. The poor little princess’s sole title to fame was the incident connected with her petticoats. Her hoops were so enormous that she used to get quite on the Queen’s nerves at Versailles. It is recorded that they once became so entangled with those of Her Majesty, that the two of them had to stand and tug one against the other to disengage themselves. Louis XV., who witnessed the incident, was much annoyed, and sent Monsieur de la Trémoille to the Duchesse du Maine with the measure of the hoops which her daughter should wear, adding that in future the princesses should maintain a more respectful distance from the Queen. One can imagine the indignation of the ireful duchess. Mademoiselle did not wear her other hoops for long. The probability is that her mother dragged her about in society as a victim for the altar, and that it was merely in obedience to her mother’s wishes that she wore such ultra-fashionable attire. She was neither pretty nor attractive, and save for her dowry, no one would have sought her hand.

The sudden demise of the Duchess’s only daughter necessitated a period of mourning, and thus stopped for a while the series of fêtes which had long since become traditional at Sceaux, though lately they had been on a less magnificent scale than of old. They were succeeded by still more moderate displays, but as at these latter gambling took place for very high stakes, they proved no less costly than their predecessors. The chief games

were *biribi*, *cavagnole*, and especially *breelan*, the highly speculative forerunner of *baccarat*. *A propos* of card-playing, the records of the time tell a strange story of a misadventure that befel a certain Monsieur de Fervacques, who, being suspected of theft by the mistress of the palace, though quite possibly the victim of a mistake on her part, was condemned without any proper proof, and treated as a common swindler. Great ladies are ever reluctant to acknowledge themselves in the wrong. The courtiers all went against Fervacques, who was banished from the Court of Sceaux for ever.<sup>1</sup>

Little by little distractions of a literary nature began to resume their sway. Despite the growing years which were making her much more like Minerva than Venus—how inappropriately had these familiar names been lavished upon her!—the Duchesse du Maine was still overwhelmed with poetical tributes, and still suffered herself to be admired.

Concerning Sceaux, Piron might have employed similar language to that which he used in connexion with the "Kingdom of the Rue St Honoré." "I have just come away from a sort of Hôtel de Rambouillet where the mistress of the house invites all the illustrious parasites of our three academies to dinner. . . . No one passes for a wit there save herself and her friends."<sup>2</sup> She cared but little whether the "wit" in which she dealt was to the taste of all her habitués, or so at least it would appear from the following impromptu which dropped from Sainte Aulaire's pen one day as he came back from Sceaux with his patience utterly exhausted :

Je suis las de l'esprit, il me met en courroux,  
Il me fait tourner la cervelle.

Lambert, je viens chercher un asile chez vous  
Entre Lamotte et Fontenelle.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Luynes."

<sup>2</sup> Marquis de Ségur, "le Royaume de la rue Saint-Honoré."

<sup>3</sup> I am weary of wit, it puts me in a rage, it makes my brain dizzy. Lambert, I am coming to seek refuge with you, betwixt Lamotte and Fontenelle.

The old Marquis used to declare that he was not only tired of wits and witticisms, but tired of life as well, that he had no heart left for anything. And indeed his career was over. He died like Fontenelle on the 20th December 1742, in his hundred and first year. He was an academician and, according to Luynes, "a man of gentle and affable disposition, who knew how to pay a well-turned compliment to a woman." His famous quatrain to the Duchess gives this proof. Although he always seemed to be on the point of death, he enjoyed, as a matter of fact, fairly equable health. He was accustomed to eat with impunity at the most irregular hours, and would stay up at night till further orders. He used to ride horseback and follow the hounds when he was ninety-eight. His death produced an immense void at Sceaux.

Next to card-playing, marionnettes were the great craze. One evening the Comte d'Eu, who had succeeded his father in the Grand Mastership of the Artillery, ordered a performance at the Arsenal, and he did not consider it beneath his dignity to direct their antics himself. In 1746 Voltaire had been present at one of these shows, and derived huge amusement from the spectacle. He afterwards sent his host some verses, which he signed "Punchinello," extolling his achievements as a soldier :

On sait que vous faites mouvoir  
De plus belles machines ;  
Vous fites sentir leur pouvoir  
A Bruxelles, à Malines ;  
Les Anglais s'y virent traités  
En vrais polichinelles ;  
Et vous avez de quoi dompter,  
Les remparts et les belles.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Voltaire, "Œuvres complètes," édit. Beuchot.

We know that you set in motion finer machines than these, and that you made their power felt at Brussels and Malines. There the English found themselves treated like veritable puppets ; and you possess the means of overcoming ramparts and beautiful women.

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*J. M. Nattier, Pinxt.*

*E. Goujean, Sculpt.*

GABRIELLE ÉMILIE LE TONNELIER DU BRETEUIL, MARQUISE DU  
CHASTELET





But marionette shows indicated a decadence at the Court of Sceaux, though a certain petty childishness was frequently the note of the behaviour there.

Madame de Pompadour, at the zenith of her feminine domination, took umbrage—women easily grow jealous of their rivals—at a coterie whose renown was spread far and wide, a coterie moreover from which vice was sternly banished, instead of being flaunted abroad as it was at the King's Court. The situation became still more strained, and her vexation increased when Voltaire in 1746 came back again to renew the glories of the Court of Sceaux, and to impart an added lustre to its brilliancy. He had not been there since he quitted the Bastille in 1716 at the time his *Œdipus* was performed. And now Madame du Maine was again to help him out of his dilemma by providing him with a home. Sceaux, indeed, was his recognised retreat.

The philosopher and his mistress had been playing for high stakes at the Duc de Richelieu's at Fontainebleau, where the court was in residence. One disastrous night Madame du Châtelet<sup>1</sup> lost a thousand louis, a portion of which she had been obliged to borrow while play was proceeding. Hoping to retrieve her position, she played more recklessly than ever, pledging her word of honour in default of ready money, and lost a further 84,000 francs with the most incredible coolness. The game over, Voltaire, who was uneasy as well as in a rage, exclaimed in English, "Don't you see that you're playing with rogues?" And some of the most illustrious people in France were present! The remark was overheard and repeated, and great was the wrath it caused. Voltaire thought discretion was the better part of valour, and made off during the night. He would not have drawn sword for an empire. Passing through a village near Essonnes, he alighted from his

<sup>1</sup> Gabrielle Émilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, Marquise du Châtelet (1706-1749).

carriage, went into an inn, wrote off a line to the Duchess, and gave it to a peasant to deliver, telling him to bring back an answer. He was asking for shelter at Sceaux. The envoy returned with a gracious reply, stating that he would be received, and that a trustworthy person would be at the château grille in readiness to conduct him to a sequestered and secret apartment. He arrived before daybreak without his companion. Little did he imagine he was to remain there for six weeks absolutely cut off from the world. Longchamp, his secretary, to whom we are indebted for these particulars, tells us that he used to come down to the Duchess's room every evening—she was then in the seventies—after she had retired to bed and dismissed her attendants. A single footman who was in the secret used to place a small table between the bed and the wall, and brought the prisoner his supper. The Princess took great delight in Voltaire's sprightly conversation, and listened with interest to his tales of the Court. He used to read her the little stories which he composed for her in his hiding-place. It was thus that he came to write *Babouc*, *Scarmentado*, *Micromegas*, and finally *Zadig*, getting through one or two chapters a morning. Madame du Maine derived considerable amusement from these over-bold productions of the licentious sceptic. She was indeed a child of the age! Voltaire used to work all day long by candle-light, never so much as getting a glimpse of the sun. The secretary brought him his meals by stealth, and used only to go out after nightfall, when he went away and had supper.

During the retirement of the poet, whose talents were then at their zenith, Madame du Châtelet, feeling that she too was equally compromised, remained quietly at home in Paris. Voltaire was generally believed to have betaken himself to the Court of Berlin. After two months had elapsed, the fair *Émilie*, who had managed to pay off her

gambling debts, was able to release her friend, and to assure him that he no longer had anything to fear from the bailiffs. The affair having blown over, the author of *Zadig*, somewhat low-spirited after his long period of solitude, openly confessed his hiding-place and reappeared in the salons of Sceaux. There he recovered all his former brilliance, adding fresh laurels to his crown, and people thought of nothing but of organising amusements in his honour. The fertile invention of Madame du Maine, aided by Madame de Staal, used to hit on some new distraction every day.

Madame du Maine as a leader of conversation was brilliantly successful, but it was necessary to seek some variety—one could not forever be talking—and they therefore abandoned themselves to the character-sketch craze. This form of amusement, diverting enough for posterity, but fraught with considerable danger for the players, was then all the rage. Madame de Staal used to acquit herself admirably, though she was accustomed to season her play with a dose of spitefulness that may have originated in the bitter recollections of her former drudgery and disappointments in love. Brunetière perhaps went too far in referring to her as a scandalmonger. She merely toyed with her rapier. Madame du Deffand, however, gave no quarter. Her portraits of the Abbé de Vaubrun and Madame du Châtelet are models of the limner's art if pasticcio is to be caricature and the artist is to mix his colours with vinegar instead of oil. Here is Madame du Châtelet: "Tall and withered, sharp-featured, with pointed nose, little sea-green eyes, expressionless mouth, teeth few and far between, and very decayed." That is an example. Others pilloried the fair *Émilie* in verse:

Cette princesse a cinquante ans  
Comptés sur son visage, etc.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This princess's fifty years are scored upon her face, etc.

To while away the hours till supper-time arrived, some one used to read aloud. They skimmed the cream off the novelties of the day in prose and verse. The tales and romances with which Voltaire had beguiled the sleepless hours of the Duchess he was now obliged, by her orders, to recite to an audience of *litterateurs*, who were astounded that works of so light and careless a nature could proceed from the same pen that had produced *la Henriade*, *Œdipe*, *Brutus*, *Zaïre*, *Mahomet* and the like. They made him promise to publish them as soon as he got back to Paris, and to send Madame du Maine the first copies for distribution among her guests.

On reaching home he did not forget his promise, but he had to reckon with the delays and requirements of the Paris publishers. With the idea of circumventing them by a characteristic trick, he caused two hundred copies of *Zadig* to be secretly struck off in the provinces, and was thus enabled to send them with very little delay to Sceaux, where people fought with each other for the possession of them. It therefore happened that before the main edition of *Zadig* was out, all Paris was talking of the book. This quickly brought the publishers to their knees, and they implored Voltaire not to deprive them of his invaluable custom.

Encouraged by the manner in which Madame du Maine had received him on his return to her salon, Voltaire and his mistress became frequent visitors at Sceaux and Anet. Despite their talents, they were not popular among the Duchess's friends, and they were avoided as much as possible. Still, since it was the will of the mistress of the house to invite them, there was nothing for it but to put up with them.

Of all her various amusements the one which made the strongest appeal to the Duchess in her old age was the theatre, and the theatre was then more than ever the rage in France. The little stage at Sceaux had lived on

through all the ups and downs of the dramatic art, and Voltaire was now about to add to its glories. In a letter to her friend Madame du Deffand, Madame de Staal has given us a witty account of the visit which Voltaire and his mistress paid to Anet on the 18th April 1747 :

Madame du Châtelet and Voltaire, who were supposed to be coming to-day, put in an appearance last night on the stroke of twelve like a couple of ghosts. A sort of mummy-like odour clung to them, as though they had but recently quitted the charnel-house. We were just getting up from table, but the ghosts were hungry and wanted supper and, what was more, beds, which had not been got ready for them. The concierge had gone to bed and had to dress herself again, and Gaya, who had offered his rooms in cases of emergency, was now called on to give them up. He packed up his things with all the speed and ill-humour of an army taken unawares, leaving a part of his baggage in the enemy's hands. Voltaire was much pleased with his quarters, but that was no consolation for Gaya. As for the lady, her bed was not properly made. We had to find her another room to-day, but note that she had made the bed herself, as there was no one to do it for her.

That is indeed a startling detail—to go on a visit to a Duchess and have to make your own bed !

The next day, the 16th, Madame de Staal adds the following postscript :

Our ghosts do not show themselves at all in the daytime. They appeared yesterday at ten o'clock at night. I don't fancy we shall see them much earlier to-day. One of them is occupied in describing deeds of derring-do, the other in writing a commentary on Newton. They will neither play nor join the promenade, and are certainly minus quantities in a society which has no interest in their learned writings.

The "ghosts," instead of annotating Newton as Madame de Staal supposed, were zealously rehearsing a comedy of Voltaire's wherewith to delight their hostess. The piece in question, *le Comte de Boursoufle*, was a farce that was a long way from equalling the comedy which the absurdities

and eccentricities of the queer couple themselves presented to the keen observation of Madame de Staal. Voltaire had originally entitled it *l'Échange*. In a metrical prologue the principal actress, Madame de la Tour, had to exclaim :

Non, je ne jouerai pas : le bel emploi vraiment ;  
 La belle farce qu'on apprête !  
 Le plaisant divertissement  
 Pour le jour de Louis, pour cette auguste fête,  
 Et pour la baronne de Sceaux !<sup>1</sup>

And Voltaire replied :

Mais pour être baronne est on si difficile ?

Je vous baise les mains, je rénonce à vous faire.  
 Vous m'en demandez trop : je m'en tirerais mal ;  
 Allez vous adresser à Madame de Staal :  
 Vous trouverez là votre affaire.<sup>2</sup>

It will be seen that in 1747 Madame de Staal's charming wit was still keeping her in high honour at the Court of Sceaux. The author of *la Henriade* thought a great deal of her, and considered her unaffected, gay, and "good form." He little suspected how she used to poke fun at him in her correspondence.

They've lost their prologue ! I have to get together the whole thing and send on the prologue as soon as possible, but not by post, because some one would pirate it. The play itself I must keep back for fear of a similar mischance, and lock it up with a hundred keys. I should have thought a latch would

<sup>1</sup>No, I will not play; a nice business to be sure, a lovely piece of drollery, a charming diversion for Louis' day, for this August fête, and for the Baronne de Sceaux !

<sup>2</sup>But is a baronne always so hard to please ? . . . I kiss my hand to you. I renounce your task ; you ask me too much. I should acquit myself ill. Go and apply to Madame de Staal. She is the right person for you.

have been good enough for such a treasure. I have well and faithfully executed my orders.

In a second letter to Madame du Deffand the fair satirist continues her piquant narrative :

Madame du Châtelet went into her third room yesterday. She could not endure the one she had chosen any longer. There was too much noise—smoke without fire, I imagine. It is not at night that she finds the noise disturbing, according to what she tells me, but during the day, when she is in the thick of her work, she says it distracts her ideas. She is engaged in reviewing her *principles*. That is an exercise she repeats every year ; if she didn't, they might escape and go so far away that she would never get a single one of them back again. There is no doubt, I think, that her head is their prison and not their natural abode. It is a case of having to keep a careful eye on them. She prefers this occupation to any other amusement, and persists in deferring her appearance till well on into the night. Voltaire has written some verses of the gallant order, and this has to some extent made up for their outrageous behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

*The Comte de Boursoufle* was played on the 14th August 1747, with Madame du Châtelet in the principal rôle—that of Mademoiselle de la Cochonnière.

<sup>1</sup> "Lettres de Mme. de Staal à Mme. du Deffand," 15th, 27th, and 30th August 1747.

## CHAPTER XX

Voltaire and Madame du Châtelet visit Sceaux (December 1747)—Voltaire reorganizes the theatre at Sceaux—*Les Originiaux ou M. du Cap Vert*—What happened at the representation of *La Prude*—Quarrel and reconciliation of Voltaire and Madame du Maine—His epistle to the Duchess (1749)—Crébillon a rival of Voltaire—Voltaire's correspondence with the Duchesse du Maine.

IT was three months later, in December, that Voltaire and his fair Émilie appeared again at Sceaux. This time they were exiles. Voltaire was accused to the part. Madame de Pompadour had just scored a great triumph in a play—*l'Enfant prodigue*—that had been performed in the private theatre of Louis XV. Voltaire had had the effrontery to congratulate her in some verses which seemed to carry with them the implication of an insult to the royal dignity. This was intolerable. The King's daughters obtained from their august father a *lettre de cachet* against the insolent minister of vice before Madame de Pompadour had time to parry the blow. Thus it befel that the poet-philosopher, once more an outcast, came yet again to crave the ever-ready hospitality of the wealthy Duchess of Sceaux. He had to pay his footing, but since wit was the coin, it was an easy matter for Voltaire ; he merely had to give rein to his fancy. The Prince des Dombes had gone off to the wars again, and the news came to Sceaux that he had distinguished himself at the battle of Lawfeld. His mother was proud of him. Voltaire of course was not the man to be backward in seizing such an opportunity of flattering the Duchess, so hey, presto ! a letter in verse



to Her Most Serene Highness! Dithyrambs in similar strain continued to arrive from far and near.

Voltaire took his revenge on Versailles by bringing the theatre of Sceaux into rivalry with the King's. Madame du Maine also took advantage of the occasion thus offered of wiping off old scores by paying back some of the epigrams which had been levelled at her in the salon of Madame de Pompadour. So they set to work in earnest. Plays were mounted at great expense, and the Duc du Maine, had he been alive, would have been terror-stricken at the way the money was thrown about. The Duchess herself took charge of the rehearsals. On two occasions Madame du Châtelet, who had a divine voice, sang *Issé*, a grand opera of the heroic order. After the performance, Voltaire, who owing to the success achieved by his mistress and his work, had a twofold reason to congratulate himself, wrote Madame du Châtelet a charming madrigal, in which he made allusion not only to her voice, but to her mathematical and philosophical attainments.

Madame du Châtelet won special applause in another of Voltaire's plays, a prose comedy. It had originally been played at Cirey, the scene of its composition, under the title of *Monsieur du Cap Vert*, but at Sceaux the name of the piece was altered to *les Originaux*. In it *Fanchon* delivers some speeches that are certainly a trifle free for the lips of a "jeune fille" to utter. Speeches à la Molière were quite in her way, and Madame du Châtelet negotiated them very skilfully.

Some verses sung at the end of the piece, entitled "*Entrée de diverses nations—après la danse*," were very indecorous. The following is the easiest to quote without shocking the reader's ear :

Tout l'Orient  
Est un vaste couvent,  
Un mussulman voit à ses volontés  
Obéir cent beautés.

La coutume est bien contraire en France.  
 Une femme sous ses lois  
 A vingt amants à la fois  
 Ah ! quelle différence !<sup>1</sup>

In this piece the "star" was ably supported by the remainder of the cast, which included the Comte de Chabot, the Marquis d'Asfeld, the Comte de Croix. Other members of the aristocracy sat side by side in the orchestra with some musicians from Paris. In the ballet, which was performed by a first-rate company from the Opera, Monseieur de Courtanvaux, an excellent dancer from the King's theatre, was observed footing it with the rest. Mademoiselle Guimard the younger, a renowned *danseuse*, made her débuts there.

Next came *la Prude*, composed in 1740 after a comedy by Wycherley called "The Plain Dealer." In his preface Voltaire says, "I have only given a faint idea of the English writer's daring, yet this imitation, veiled as it is, is still so strong that none would dare to perform it in a Paris theatre." At Sceaux they were doubtless not so rigid. In the course of the play, which would sound tame enough to modern ears, he gives expression to the following reflection, which still holds good :—

Que la femme prude, en sa vertu sévère,  
 Peut en public faire beaucoup de bien,  
 Mais en secret souvent ne valoir rien.<sup>2</sup>

*La Prude* was a sort of female Tartufe. The author himself sustained a rôle in his play together with Madame de Staal, who was an accomplished comedienne, and Madame du Châtelet, who was not a first-rate actress.

<sup>1</sup> The whole of the East is one vast convent. A mussulman beholds a hundred beauties obedient to his will. But in France the custom is just the opposite. There a woman has twenty lovers at a time. Oh, what a difference !

<sup>2</sup> The prude, severely virtuous, may give a great idea of goodness in public, but in private she may be quite worthless.

Such a huge number of people came to witness the first performance, that Madame du Maine was quite worn out with the task of receiving them. The authorised number of invitations had evidently been exceeded without her knowledge. It was in vain that she expostulated with her secretaries. On the next occasion matters were worse than ever. So terrible was the throng, that the little Duchess, finding herself overwhelmed and not knowing where in the world to put them all—they were a very mixed set—became disgusted with her own performances, and thought of giving them up altogether. Still, she was determined to find out the reason of the phenomenal vogue that had overtaken her theatrical soirées. The explanation of the matter was that she had been so unwise as to delegate to others the task of issuing the invitations, and when, as the result of her inquiries, she learned who the people were that had been invited in her name, she gave full voice to her indignation. It will not be denied that for a Princess of the Blood matters had been managed rather casually.

“Visitors may walk straight in. They must arrive at six o’clock precisely, and their carriages must be in the courtyard at half-past seven. After six the doors will be opened to nobody.” As will be guessed, it was the authors themselves who had thus thrown wide the palace doors without thinking of consulting the good pleasure of the châtelaine. D’Argenson states that “to lend an additional attraction” to the invitation, Voltaire had promised his friends “that they should not see the Duchesse du Maine.” Whatever may be the truth of the matter—and such outrageous conduct would have been quite in keeping with the ingratitude habitually displayed by the author of *La Prude*—the Duchess’s hall had been transformed into the pit of a popular theatre. This time Madame du Maine was furious, and sent the guilty couple packing sooner than they had reckoned.

Voltaire and his concubine were now quite out of favour at Sceaux. However, our occasional outlaw could not afford to remain long at loggerheads with a patron powerful enough to secure him immunity from the Bastille, and he soon had occasion to think of her again.<sup>1</sup> Two years later, after having enjoyed the height of favour, thanks to the all-powerful influence of Madame de Pompadour, he became disgusted with the King's Court on account of the extravagant eulogies that were lavished on his rival Crébillon. Once again he had to bid adieu to the intoxicating pleasures of Versailles and Fontainebleau. Where was he to betake himself with his vexation and his grief? He thought to rekindle the enthusiasm of his erstwhile admirers through the influence of the Duchesse du Maine, whose good graces, however, he had first of all to win back again. The Duchess, who had for so long been the Arbiter of Taste, had now lost something of her pre-eminence; at least, she was assuredly less hearkened to than Louis XV.'s whimsical favourite. Nevertheless it was to the Queen of Sceaux that Voltaire made so bold as to address the following beautiful and well-known epistle. None was more skilled in the art of flattery than he. Garnished with all sorts of rhetorical compliments intended for the Princess or the *beaux esprits* of her court, his letter, the style of which was so grand and so sure upon the wing, adumbrated a very controvertible theory regarding the introduction of the Love motive into tragedy.

Madame, you have beheld the passing of that era, that admirable era to whose glory you so richly contributed by your ideals and your example, that era which in so many respects serves as a model, and peradventure as a reproach, to our own. It was in those splendid times that the Condés, your ancestors, covered with such a wealth of laurels, were wont to cultivate and encourage the Arts. It was above all in your palace, Madame, that these same Arts were offered a welcome and a

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires du Marquis d'Argenson," "Mémoires de Luynes."

home. I shall ever remember how, when little more than a child, I had sometimes the good fortune to listen within those walls to a man whose learning, vast though it was, had not availed to overload his genius ; I speak of the scholar who watched over the education of the Duc de Bourgogne, as well as over your own and that of the Duc du Maine. . . . Monsieur de Malézieu seemed by the vehemence of his delivery and by efforts which often produced a sudden wave of enthusiasm in his hearers to supplement the poverty of the language, and to instil into his accents the whole soul of the great geniuses of Athens. . . .

Your Most Serene Highness recollects that I had the honour of reading *Œdipus* in your presence. It was assuredly not the dramatic art of Sophocles that suffered condemnation at that tribunal ; but you and Monsieur le Cardinal de Polignac, and Monsieur de Malézieu and your whole court, united in censuring me, and with very just reason, for having introduced the word *love* into a work in which Sophocles had succeeded so well without that unhappy and extraneous adornment ; and that which alone had won for my play a popular success was the only characteristic which you condemned as a fault. On the stage Love must be a tyrant and all in all, or he must be absent altogether—he is not made for the second place.

*A propos* of *Œdipus*, the work of Voltaire's young days, Madame du Maine, having once urged him to banish love from his tragedies, could not but persevere in her view and uphold a thesis which, contestable though it was, had been so eloquently advanced. Supported by the literary influence of a princess who was already a celebrity, Voltaire in implacable mood made a great effort to vanquish his rival, and composed three new tragedies at Sceaux. They were, it is true, put together somewhat hurriedly, and are not among the most successful of his repertory, but their verve and spirit atone for their lack of careful workmanship. They were *Orestes*, *Semiramis*, and *Catiline* or *Rome Sauvée*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In 1718 the *Œdipus* of Voltaire, without the love motive, had been refused at the Théâtre Français. The young author, who was as yet inexperienced, revised his play for Sceaux, where it was soon afterwards

*Orestes* was played for the first time in Paris on the 12th June 1750. It was a more or less triumphant rejoinder to Crébillon's *Electra*, written without the introduction of any love intrigue in the simplest Sophoclean manner. "Love," averred Voltaire in one of his prefaces, "never called forth so many tears as Nature." The distinction was a subtle one. Is not love one of the mainsprings of human nature? It is certainly a matter for surprise that Madame du Maine, who was a *précieuse* and a sentimentalist, should have declared herself in favour of such a sophism. Seeing everything with the eyes of her great Voltaire, as she had formerly looked on everything with the eyes of her great Malézieu, she did not recognise that every people has its own particular genius; that what found favour at Athens might find none at Paris, and that if such an absolute theory had been carried to its logical conclusion, the world would have been the poorer by *Polyeuctus* and *Berenice*.

It was during this literary tournament, in which he had been able to offer a check to Crébillon, that Voltaire had been skilful enough to win back the favour of the aged Queen of Sceaux. Henceforth he was careful not to lose it again. Scarcely had he left her after a prolonged sojourn beneath her roof than he set about sending her letters full of affected homage. So curious are they that we may be forgiven for reproducing an extract or two here although, in common with the famous epistle that we have already quoted, they are included in the great man's correspondence :

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performed. He introduced a half-hearted love episode that had no particular connexion with the play as a whole, and tended to mar it. Madame du Maine disapproved of this unhappy addition. She had previously remarked of Longepierre's *Electra*, in which Love played too great a part, that "it was a statue of Praxiteles disfigured by a modern hand." The Court of Sceaux applauded the youthful author, but animadverted on a couple of too famous lines which presaged the tendencies of the anti-religious philosopher.



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Madame, Your Most Serene Highness has been obeyed, if not as well, at all events as promptly, as your merits deserve. You commanded me to produce *Catilina*, and the task is done. The grand-daughter of the great Condé, the guardian of good taste and of good sense was rightly indignant at seeing Crébillon's monstrous farce meet with approbation. . . .

My Patroness,—I, your protégé, must needs tell Your Highness that, in everything, I have followed the counsel you have deigned to give me. You would not believe how greatly Cicero and Cæsar have gained thereby. Those gentry would certainly have followed your advice had they lived in our day. I have just read through *Rome Sauvée*. The parts which Your Serene Highness embellished produced an immense effect (November 1749).

I have so saturated my mind with Cicero, Sallust, and Plutarch ; my heart was so warmed by the desire to please you that I finished the play in a week. The effort has been appalling. It is hardly credible, but it was done for the sake of Madame la Duchesse du Maine. We have to-day rehearsed the piece with these alterations, and before whom do you think, Madame ? Franciscans, Jesuits, Oratorians, Academicians, Magistrates who knew by heart all there is to know about Catiline. You would never believe what a triumph *your tragedy* achieved in the presence of this grave assembly. Soul of Cornelia ! We shall have the Roman Senate at Your Highness's feet on Monday.

At the same time, in a letter to the Duchess, he swore by his genius and his protectress to dedicate to her both *Electra* and *Catilina*. " I promise that the dedication will be a long account of all that I have learnt from the said genius at her court."

Such was the origin of *Rome Sauvée* and of the *rapprochement* between the author and the Duchess. Voltaire's new five-act play was performed at Sceaux on the 21st June 1750. Egeria had not forgotten the disorders that had marred the last occasion, and had taken the necessary precautions against any repetition of such unseemly overcrowding, witness this note which

Voltaire sent to the Marquise de Malause from one room in the Palace of Sceaux to another :

Amiable Colette, ask Her Most Serene Highness to accept our homage and our endeavours to please her. There will not be more than fifty people at the outside. . . .

Voltaire took the part of Cicero. His performance was a triumph, the audience comprising such names as Diderot, Marmontel, Hénault, the Abbés Voisenon, de Raynal and d'Olivier, the Ducs de Richelieu and de la Vallière, and the Père de la Tour. After gathering together at his house in Paris an audience of litterateurs and critics for the first performance, his great desire had been to have the play given before an assemblage of aristocrats. One of his detractors, La Chaussée, in a letter to Leblanc, says, "He is like those pastry-cooks who cannot sell their wares and therefore eat them themselves." But on this occasion the pastry was appreciated by those who got the crumbs. When Voltaire, drawing himself up to his full height in his toga, exclaimed :

Romains, j'aime la gloire et ne veux point m'en taire ;  
Des travaux des humains c'est le digne salaire.  
Sénat, en vous servant, il la faut acheter :  
Qui n'ose la vouloir, n'ose la mériter.<sup>1</sup>

it was not so much the verses learned by heart that gained the applause of the audience, but the conviction that they were listening to a speech that came from the very heart of the orator. "It seemed," said Condorcet, "as though his hearers were giving ear to Cicero himself making apology for this 'last infirmity of noble mind.'"

When the play was over the Duchess, having proclaimed to Voltaire her amazement and admiration at the new rôle he had created and interpreted, asked him the name of

<sup>1</sup> Romans, I am in love with Glory and will not cease to dwell upon it. Of human toil it is the worthy recompense. Senate, in your service it must be purchased. Who dares not strive for it dares not deserve it.

the actor who had played the part of *Lentulus Sura*. "Madame," answered Voltaire, "he was the best of us all." His name was Lekain.

In *Rome Sauvée*, a tragedy which is never mentioned nowadays and which is no longer regarded as a classic, Cicero appeared on the stage with becoming dignity. He discoursed most eloquently while Cæsar was presented to the audience as the future Lord of Rome. Voltaire's verses were instinct with republican energy and Roman virility of soul.

*Orestes*, which was only played nine times in Paris, had less success than Crébillon's *Electra*. It contained nevertheless some fine lines, some of which, such as the following, were characterised by a certain religious feeling :

Qui pourrait de ces dieux encenser les autels,  
S'ils voyaient sans pitié les malheurs des mortels,  
Si le crime, insolent dans son heureux ivresse,  
Écrasait à loisir l'innocente faiblesse ?<sup>1</sup>

The Duchess's enthusiasm for *Rome Sauvée* may have been sincere, that of Voltaire for the Duchess was certainly dictated by self-interest, witness the following letter which he wrote to d'Argental :

"I was bound to inform Madame la Duchesse du Maine that I had completed this *Catilina* which she had so often commanded of me. She it was who gave me the idea, and I at least owed it to her to let her know that it was finished. I shall have need of her patronage ; she is not one to be despised. As long as she lives the Duchess will control many opinions, and will voice her own far and wide." This letter shows that the influence of the Duchess was paramount at the Academy. All through her life she had had Academicians under her thumb and,

<sup>1</sup> Who could offer incense at the altars of these gods if they could look without pity on the ills of mortal men ; if Crime, insolent in its heedless inebriety, should crush weak Innocence as it listed ?

“ if she had been a man ” as she was once heard to declare she would have been one herself.

To express his gratitude to the Duchess for the hospitality she had extended to him at Sceaux, Voltaire sent her a letter, half verse and half prose, in which he humorously recalled her prison days of 1719.

On admira sur vos traces  
Minerve auprès de l'Amour.  
Ah ! ne leur donnez plus ce Chalon pour séjour !  
Et que les Muses et les Grâces  
Jamais plus loin que Sceaux n'aillent fixer leur cour.<sup>1</sup>

That ill-omened epoch had grown faint and dim in the recollection of Madame du Maine, and she did not care to speak of it. It required the boldness of a Voltaire to remind her of it. The last word in sycophancy is to be found in a letter he wrote to her from Potsdam which contains the following phrase, the very type and pattern of ignoble flattery. “ In the whole wide world only Frederick the Great could lure me away from the Court of the Duchesse du Maine.”

To that court he never returned again. The glories of Sceaux had had their day.

<sup>1</sup> Wherever you passed by, men marvelled to behold Wisdom and Love united. Ah! give them not this Chalon for their abode, and grant that they may never fix their court farther away than Sceaux.

## CHAPTER XXI

Dispersal of the Court of Sceaux—Death of the Duchesse d'Estrées (27th December 1747)—Madame du Maine's indifference towards her dead friends—Her saying about Madame d'Estaing—The Marquise du Deffand and the fading glories of Sceaux—Her humiliation at Sceaux—Madame du Maine's letter to the Marquise (7th June 1747)—Illness and death of Madame de Staal (12th June 1750)—Her romantic attachments—The Chevalier du Menil—Dacier—Character of Madame de Staal—Her memoirs—Her letters—Her drawing-room comedies—She describes herself—The Marquise du Deffand and d'Alembert—Madame du Maine and her religious ideas—Saint-Joseph's Salon—Madame de Staal and Madame du Deffand—Madame du Maine receives the King at Anet (7th June 1749)—Her continued distraction—A letter of Voltaire's concerning the Duchess—Her old age—Her *entourage*—Her rules.

PLEASURE hastens away when the sands of life begin to run low, and weariness and *ennui* generally come to fill its place. Nevertheless, the frivolous have a way of making pleasure outlast the usual limits, and Madame du Maine, old and somewhat ailing as she was, never suffered *ennui* to lay its heavy burden on her bright and careless spirit. Her court was sadly deserted towards the middle of the century, but she could still offer to the few loyal and distinguished men and women who composed her shrunken following the charm of conversation which, thanks to her, was never lacking in brilliance and sparkle, and which she directed with as much skill as her contemporary Madame Geoffrin, and with an added prestige and authority derived from her exalted rank. The fashions of the day and literary topics would come under discussion, and the

corruption of the King's court would be severely animadverted upon. Foreign politics took up an increasing measure of attention, and the contents of the gazettes often furnished material for conversation. There was no subject with which the Duchess was not conversant or about which she failed to busy herself. She possessed the great secret of success in conversation, the gift of making others talk. The little old princess must needs have something forever going on about her. Her mind was never at rest. This it was that used to bring despair to the bosom of Madame de Staal, who was of a more reposeful disposition. "That was bustle enough in all conscience!" she wrote one day,<sup>1</sup> "for one who yearns for a quiet life." This wistful reflection had been provoked by another change of residence on the part of the Duchess, who could never remain in one spot for any length of time. One day when she was ill she complained to her doctor that he was not curing her quickly enough. "What was the good," she wanted to know, "of compelling her to go without so many things and of making her live in seclusion?" "But Your Most Serene Highness has at present forty people at the Château!" "Forty or fifty people!" she replied, "well, for a princess that is practically seclusion."<sup>2</sup>

Despite the best efforts of the Duchess the number of vacancies in her little court continued to increase. This state of affairs vexed and irritated her. People of seventy-five rarely contract new friendships, and old ones begin to grow dim across the misty years. Death the Reaper was busy around her. Sainte-Aulaire had disappeared, Fontenelle was well over ninety; true, his mind was as youthful as ever, but it was difficult for him to get about, and he scarcely ever came to Sceaux. As<sup>3</sup> for Hénault, he was hand in glove with the Queen, and was inclined to

<sup>1</sup> Mme. de Staal to M. d'Héricourt, 12th October 1745.

<sup>2</sup> "Œuvres de Chamfort," 1852 edition, p. 37.

turn his back on the Duchess, whose hospitality he found rather too authoritative and irksome, despite the somewhat out-of-date diversions with which she endeavoured to enliven it. Yet the old habitués of her court still acknowledged the potency of its attractions. Old age appeared to have but little effect on these followers of Epicurus whose happy destiny it seemed to be to set Time at defiance and to remain ever young and ever amiable. But at Sceaux as elsewhere Death came at length, though its coming was so long deferred. It must be concluded that intellectual distractions are as an elixir against the infirmities of age.

When her friends fell away of their own accord the pride of the Duchess was hurt, but when death laid its hand upon them their departure left her indifferent. The joyous company that still surrounded her brooked no interruption in their round of gaiety. Death was a bore, and if a guest had to set out for the other world, then let him be packed off as promptly and with as little fuss as possible! For example, the Duchess d'Estrées, a sister of the Duc de Nevers, and a woman of literary and intellectual tastes, who passed half her life on terms of the closest intimacy with Madame du Maine, met her death at Anet on the 27th September 1747 as the result, says Luynes, of a fall on the great staircase of the Château. When she was already dying, the Duchess came to see her as she lay in bed and told her that she would not come again, but that she (Madame d'Estrées) must get up and come down next day. Two days later the sufferer was *in extremis*. The Duchess when she heard it, evinced the greatest astonishment and hurried upstairs followed by all the people in her salon "for the company had not yet finished play." The surgeon, the curé, and the apothecary were all three together in the poor woman's room, "but her condition remained unchanged." At length, Extreme Unction was administered to her in the Duchess's presence.

As soon as Madame d'Estrées had breathed her last the Duchess took to her bed in distraction. Nevertheless, she did not hesitate on the morrow to defame the dead woman's memory by asserting in a letter she wrote to the Marquis de Lassay that her friend had died of apoplexy brought on by over-indulgence in the pleasures of the table. In saying this her idea was simply to put people off the scent lest Anet as a place of abode should derive an unenviable reputation from the accident. And this from the pen that had a few days before been lavishing protestations of tenderness on Madame d'Estrées! In the letter which we quote below, an unconscious selfishness is discernible beneath a veil of deceptive affection.

Why do you not come to see me? The presence of a friend is well-nigh the sole pleasure which I can enjoy. Everyone is talking to me about you, everyone can see you. Alas! how happy everyone is! Do what you will, Madame, you will never find another who can love you as I can love. You tell me you love me dearly and I am sure you do, and that enables me to endure with patience the splendour and vanity of the court.

Splendour and vanity! Was she, then, our much-courted princess, beginning to learn how fitly these two words go one with the other when religion is not at hand to illumine the spirit and uplift the soul above the incense-clouds of adulation? Alas, it was but a transient reflection with Madame du Maine. Scarce had the body of her friend grown cold in death than the Duchess was anxious to get back to her cards again, and neither she nor her companions bestowed another thought on the luckless *Api* (such had been the sobriquet of Madame d'Estrées) who for all her sixty years had ever been so full of charm. Madame de Staal, whose dependent position necessarily imposed some restraint upon the expression of her feelings, found such conduct too much for her generous heart. She wrote to her friend Madame du Deffand in terms of repressed indignation, sarcastically



expressing her astonishment that they had not begun comedy-acting again at Sceaux after the "awful scene" that had just been witnessed there. "Nevertheless," she added, "I won't by any means promise you that we shan't be seeing Monsieur de Senneterre's comedy again before we leave. Fortunately for me I have no part in it at all. I lament, look on in astonishment, and can do nothing. One can but do one's duty; the rest must take care of itself."

"Poor Madame d'Estrées is being buried here this afternoon; then the curtain will fall on that episode and we shall hear no more of it." It was Madame de Staal again who wrote those words, nor, a few days later, could she refrain from recording this melancholy reflection. "It must be conceded that we go a little beyond human nature. I can behold my obsequies already. The greater the regret the more elaborate will be the trappings." There was a suggestion of scepticism in that little observation, for, like her mistress, Madame de Staal was a sceptic. At the Court of Sceaux who was not? To keep *ennui* at bay what means are more efficacious than to plunge into the whirlpool of materialistic pleasures? Madame du Maine mourned but little the loss of her old friends, because, being old, they could no longer minister to her pleasure. Madame de Staal, the constant witness of her later years, tells us that she had been known to display complete indifference at the death of people who, when alive, would have made her shed tears had they been a quarter of an hour late for a game of cards or a promenade.<sup>1</sup>

The story of her attitude at the death of Madame d'Estrées recalls one of those cruel remarks of which, according to the statement of her intimate acquaintance, Madame du Maine was but too prone to deliver herself. It is President Hénault to whom we are indebted for the

<sup>1</sup> Madame de Staal, "Mémoires."

anecdote. Madame d'Estaing, another of her *habituées*, had failed to put in an appearance at one of her gatherings. The Duchess was in tears and completely beside herself. "Mon Dieu!" said Madame de Charost, "I never thought your Highness cared so much for Madame d'Estaing." "Care for her?" retorted the Duchess. "Not at all!" But I should be fortunate if I could do without what I do not care for." And she began to laugh, adds President Hénault, for she liked people to rally her. But there was really no malice in her; she was merely a spoilt child grown old. It was the Marquise du Deffand whose amiable and witty society cast an added lustre over the declining glories of Sceaux. It may be that her title to fame is greater than that of Madame du Maine, for while the latter was courted principally on account of her rank, the former owed her reputation to her intellectual brilliance alone. Of all who frequented the little court of Sceaux during this final period of its history, the Marquise du Deffand was the most pampered and the most sought after. For a long time the Marquise had no other abode but Sceaux, and she lived there practically the whole year round. There she found repose after the stormy experiences of her younger days, and her liaison with President Hénault softened the bitterness she felt at the Duchess's occasional outbursts of temper. For with her naturally domineering and despotic disposition Madame du Maine would not hear of sharing her guests even with the nearest of their relatives. Each of her courtiers was subjected to a strict rule which was not to be evaded save by strategem. She would not brook that any of them should leave her without permission, "a permission which she sometimes took pleasure in refusing." Such subjection was as disagreeable as it was humiliating, and in the long run it became quite intolerable for Madame du Deffand, Madame du Maine's former friendship for her having given place to a sort of

tyrannical jealousy. Whenever it happened that the Marquise arrived a little late she was received with reproaches, witness the bitter-sweet tone of the following letter which the Duchess wrote her on the 7th June 1747. It was a kind of benevolent ultimatum addressed to a visitor who had been guilty of allowing herself to become forgetful of the flight of time in the society of another friend.

I have only to-day received, Madame, the letter which you took the trouble to write me on Friday. I received it with much pleasure, but I should have derived still more satisfaction from it had it not contained the news that you were postponing your return to Sceaux. I had been hoping to see you back again to-day, and I confess I am very vexed that I shall have to wait until Wednesday. I can quite understand that Madame de Luynes is so pleased with your company as to wish you to stay on with her, but I feel confident that you have not overlooked the promise you made me not to be more than a week on your travels, and that the two days you have been unable to refuse Madame de Luynes will not be followed by any further delay. I am very glad that she should think of me, but, to tell you the truth, metaphysical friendship is not the sort of thing for this world—it should be reserved for disembodied spirits. If she feels towards me as you say she does, I cannot believe that she would have given up her little visits to Sceaux, or that Monsieur de Luynes would have objected to her fulfilling the ordinary obligations of friendship. At all events, I hope she will make amends by letting you remain with me and not attracting you too frequently to Dampierre.

I am greatly touched by your assurances of friendship, and by your promise of doing your utmost, when you return to Sceaux, to make up for your absence. I assure you, Madame, that I find it very long, and that I am waiting with great impatience for Wednesday to come.<sup>1</sup>

For this rating Madame du Deffand was indebted simply and solely to the fact that she had been away two

<sup>1</sup> "Correspondance de Madame du Deffand," published by M. de Lescure.

days longer than she was supposed to have been at her aunt's, the Duchess de Luynes, owing to the confinement of her friend, Madame de Guiche. The Marquise had to offer unlimited excuses for the tardiness of her return. Madame de Staal played the part of secretary to her mistress and frequently arranged matters between the Duchess and her guest.

It often fell to the lot of Madame de Staal to negotiate regarding the quarters to be assigned to the Marquise, who had also become, with increasing years, somewhat hard to please.

I am delighted with your proposal to come and spend a month with us at Sceaux. I haven't a doubt that you will get the quarters you wish for, but I think it would be inadvisable to say much about them till just before your arrival.

I shall take good care not to mention that you have made the acquaintance of the Duchess of Modena—that would spoil everything. If you find it difficult to remain at Sceaux, try, my Queen, to content yourself with our little Château and so avoid the murmurings and perhaps the complaints that would only upset you. Though possibly you are considered less kind, there is no diminution in the desire to see you. The longing for company grows greater every day, and I foresee that if you have apartments and do not occupy them there will be a deal of longing for the individual you keep away, whoever it may be. . . . The great ones, by dint of puffing themselves out, are becoming so thin that you can almost see daylight through them. They are a real study, and I know of nothing so well calculated to bring one back to a philosophic frame of mind.

The Duchess offers you any rooms you like. I may add, between ourselves, that if in the Grand Château you only appear in the evening and are frequently away in Paris, you will be regarded with anything but favour, if for no other reason than that you would be setting a dangerous example of independence. I, therefore advise you, my Queen, in defiance of my own inclinations, not to accept this habitation unless you are willing to saddle yourself with more than you undertake in the other.

In her next letter the gentle Madame de Staal rallies her " Queen " as she calls her with a little airy persiflage.

The day before yesterday, I read your letters to Her Highness. She was in a state of great alarm at the thunder and that did not conduce to a proper appreciation of your gallantries. Another time, I will be careful not to expose you to the fury of the storm. A few days ago we were swimming in delight ; at present we are swimming in rain. Our ideas, which had grown so gentle and agreeable, are in a fair way to become as black as ever again.

This attitude of submissive resignation, which Madame du Deffand had rather unwillingly to assume consorted but ill with her nature. Madame de Staal's wit and high spirits alone enabled her to endure the yoke, for though it is true that her intimate friendship with a Princess of the Blood had won back for her the social position which her youthful follies had lost her, gratitude was not her predominant quality, and she had long since forgotten this service.<sup>1</sup> She foresaw that her old friend's death could not long be deferred, and like a wise woman was taking measures for getting together a salon of her own in Paris.

The Princess was far too discerning not to have seen long ago that this cooling-off was bound to come. Nevertheless, she could not endure that one who had benefited so long at her hands should draw away from her in this fashion, and her wrath was very great.

It was Madame du Deffand's friendship for Madame de Staal that caused her to postpone for yet a little while longer the fulfilment of her plans for settling down in Paris. Mingled with her ideas of having a salon of her own was the secret desire of holding herself in readiness to gather in the fugitives from Sceaux when the death of the Duchess should send them flying helter-skelter, an

<sup>1</sup> M. de Lescure, " Correspondance de Madame du Deffand."

eventuality but too easily foreseen. The letters she wrote to Madame de Staal shed a vivid light on her later visits to Sceaux in the course of which, from 1720 onwards, she was brought into relationship with Voltaire. The two met there frequently and became increasingly appreciative of one another. From the philosophic point of view they were admirably matched.

On the 12th June 1750, Madame du Maine lost a friend who, having always been most ready to serve her, must therefore have been the most precious of her intimates. Madame de Staal died beneath her mistress's roof at Sceaux at the age of sixty-six.<sup>1</sup> More or less unhappy in her matrimonial relations, living to a great extent apart from her husband, who was relegated to Gennevilliers, unblessed with children, consumed by domestic and monetary anxieties, harried by the ever-increasing demands of her mistress who kept her in ceaseless thralldom at Sceaux, Madame de Staal had for many years past suffered from a complaint which, though in no degree diminishing her intellectual graces, had aged her before her time, and at length brought her to the grave. She struggled on for a while and finally died at the post of duty. She was buried in the Parish Church at Sceaux in the family vault of the du Maines, a distinction which was certainly her due. Thus it was that Death brought with it her reward.

All her life long Rose de Launay had experienced an irresistible yearning for the romantic and ideal, but this longing did not yield her happiness for, as her biographers have said, "sometimes she loved and her love was unrequited, sometimes she was loved but did not love in her

<sup>1</sup> On the 16th June 1750 was buried in this church (Sceaux) Dame Marguerite Jeanne Cordier de Launay, aged sixty-six years or thereabouts, recently deceased, wife of Messire Jean Jacques de Staal, Knight of the Royal and Military Order of Saint Louis, brigadier-general in the King's Forces, Captain in the Swiss Guards." Deed drawn up by N. de Fraissy, Curé at Sceaux, and quoted by M. Advielle.

turn." The letters she wrote to the Chevalier du Ménéil are no less attractive than her Memoirs, and merit inclusion in the correspondence of the illustrious women of France. They wrote each other from their separate chambers in the Bastille, and their letters—a medley of prose and verse—swiftly assumed an idyllic character, and remain among the most delightful specimens of their kind that the eighteenth century has bequeathed to us.<sup>1</sup> The unhappy ending adds a melancholy and indefinable charm to the tale of an attachment which never strayed beyond the limits of decorum.

Of the life of pleasure which for forty years she shared with her mistress at Sceaux,<sup>2</sup> she seems to have retained only bitter recollections, a fact which goes some way to justify the charge of ingratitude which certain critics have been half-inclined to bring against her. Her Memoirs as a whole shed what is to the historian a valuable light on the character of the Duchess. Madame de Staal writes more simply, with less conscious artistry than the Queen of Sceaux, and though her style is modelled on that of her mistress it corrects its vices and imitates only its virtues.

In history the memory of Madame de Staal will remain inseparably bound up with that of the Duchess, and it will never be possible to mention the one without taking into account the other. We owe it to Rose de Launay's intelligent record of what came under her notice at the Court of Sceaux that we are enabled to mingle with the throng, to behold the Duchess "in her habit as she

<sup>1</sup> These admirable letters which, according to M. de Lescure, "flow with all the artlessness of a dialogue and all the sparkle of a comedy," in the view of Madame de Rémusat compensated the reading public of 1809 for the disappointment which awaited them on the appearance of the Correspondence of Madame du Deffand.

<sup>2</sup> "The prejudice," wrote Madame de Staal, "which leads the generality to imagine that those who are born of humble parentage or in straitened circumstances cannot have been properly educated, results in people being grateful to them for their lack of worth."

lived," and to follow the everyday life of an opulent despotic and cultured princess of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> She furnishes us moreover with some highly interesting details concerning the Cellamare conspiracy in narratives which Villemain has christened "The Memoirs of the Conquered Party." In the words of Sainte-Beuve she had the gift of imparting to her records and reflections a concise and indelible touch. Fontenelle, on the other hand, judging them by severe literary canons, used to declare them pleasantly written enough, but not worth the trouble of writing. "So the women think," replied a man of taste, "but not the men." "The women are right, though they may not be able to give their reasons," was Fontenelle's rejoinder.

We are indebted to the Duc de Choiseul for the preservation of her letters. The style, which is always becoming and often ironic, is, as has already been observed, admirably typical of this witty and artificial epoch. She gave a further proof of her insight into human nature in the two comedies which she wrote for the theatre at Sceaux, and which are included in her works under the titles of *l'Engouement* and *la Mode*. But it is with them as with the majority of the comedies of those days, the wit and delicacy which they exhibit are not sufficiently full-bodied for the strong tastes of the present time. Nevertheless, they provided diversion for her contemporaries. To certain references we no longer possess the key, for more than any other form of art the drawing-room comedy derives its success from happy allusion to the personages and events of the day.

<sup>1</sup> Towards the end of her life the Duchesse du Maine no longer exerted her former influence, even in the Republic of Letters. The Abbé Trublet relates that in 1749 he was dining one evening at Fontenelle's house with Madame de Staal who asked his vote as an Academician in support of the candidature of a protégé of Madame du Maine's. Fontenelle, who favoured the Abbé Trublet, refused point blank, which was more than he would have dared to do twenty years earlier.



Taken altogether, the idea we obtain of Madame de Staal's disposition from her writings is more flattering than real. Notwithstanding its apparent spontaneity the gaiety which marks her literary style was of the head rather than of the heart. In society she was often moody and taciturn. Her tribulations had been so great that they had left some bitterness behind, and what is more injurious for a spirit that is inclined to soar than to feel itself degraded and thrust down? But the Duchess put up with her exhibitions of petulance out of consideration for a devotion that had never swerved, that had even endured eighteen months of prison for her sake. Madame de Staal remained her close friend until death. Her disappointments in love, her innate pride, the consciousness of her intellectual worth, her long contact with underlings so entirely unworthy of a cultured mind such as hers, all the circumstances, in a word, of her early life had combined to embitter her heart.

The Duchesse du Maine despite this new and most grievous bereavement continued to resist the invasion of the years. But at Sceaux a great light had been quenched, and its glories began to grow dim. The intellectual radiance that had for so many years illumined it had passed beneath the horizon and twilight had taken its place. Sceaux was done with, and was talked about no more. Madame du Deffand's assistance had become more than ever necessary to keep matters going in the little Court, and frequently the Marquise would stay there for weeks at a time. "You are settling down there with d'Alembert," her friends wrote her from Paris. D'Alembert, a fresh actor who now comes on the stage, was a natural son of the Marquise de Tencin and Destouches the poet. For some time he assisted the Marquise, as Madame de Staal had done before him, to support the burden of the hospitality of Sceaux, and had become, in his turn, an habitu  of the Duchess's salon. Newfangled and

daring were the ideas he introduced. In the field of frivolity and pleasure, scepticism in religious matters finds the soil ready prepared.

Epicurean that he was, d'Alembert was not afraid to send word as follows to the Marquise: "You appear to me to be in a condition of deadly melancholy, but why? With a good supper you can have whomsoever you want, and afterwards, if you like, you can play fast and loose with your guests." Such was not the philosophy of Madame de Sévigné, as expressed in a letter she wrote to Bussy in 1689. "I do not understand," she says, "how anyone can have a moment's tranquillity in this world unless one pays heed to God and to His Will. With that support, which none can do without, one can endure the greatest misfortunes." Those two sayings are the measure of the whole gulf that sunders the seventeenth century from the eighteenth.

Madame du Maine, though she had never lived a very Christian life, had made no great departure from religious practice. Though perhaps her observances were not prompted by profound convictions, her conduct was at least dictated by a respect for convention that was part and parcel of her dignity as a princess. Both at Anet and at Sceaux she had her private chapel, where she regularly attended service. She had always had, even in prison, her official confessor. Voltaire was welcomed by her as a poet, a dramatist, a courtier and an amusing talker, but not as a philosopher. His correspondence with Madame du Deffand shows that he had attempted, even before d'Alembert, to convert her, sexagenarian though she was, to his atheistic views, but he never essayed to exercise his pernicious influence on the Duchess. In her old age, had any one rallied her on the length of her confessions, she might have retorted with the ironic words employed by her old friend President Hénault when putting off a too inquisitive questioner. "Well, I

am mustering my shortcomings, and they are many. You never know how rich you are till you have to pack up."

In company with d'Alembert Madame du Maine had made a further advance into the domain of the encyclopædists. Philosophy had ever had an attraction for her, and she was quite equal to carrying on a discussion with these learned men. Two volumes of the Dictionary appeared in 1751, Fontenelle's science being followed by d'Alembert's philosophy. The new member of the little court stood high in Madame du Deffand's favour, and kept her for some time longer at Sceaux, where she came almost solely to prepare recruits for her "Convent of Saint Joseph," that is to say, to lure away the guests of the Duchess. The death of the Marquis du Deffand, which occurred in 1750, furnished her with a reason for cutting short altogether her visits to Madame du Maine, visits which by reason of the irritability of the Duchess's temper she had latterly endeavoured to render as rare and as brief as possible. It was now that she founded her famous salon in Paris. For the Duchess it was farewell to her witty Marquise—that Queen of the Bees was off to gather followers in another hive.

In coterie departures are epidemic and multiply at the first signal. Thus at Sceaux the example of Madame du Deffand was followed by others, to the huge despair of the Duchess. "Ungrateful wretches!" she would cry. "False friends! Deserters!"

Among the latest admissions to the Court of Sceaux had been the poet Destouches, but he had proved less of a success than his natural son. The fact was that at this period philosophers were at a premium and poets at a discount. Naturally proud of his talents, and piqued at the lack of interest with which the Duchess regarded his opera *Radegonde*, he one day took French leave,<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Adolphe Julien.

leaving behind in his room the following somewhat discourteous valediction :

Dans une paix profonde  
 De soins délivré,  
 Philosophe ignoré,  
 Je ne tiens plus au monde,  
 Que pour en médire à mon gré.  
 J'ai fait ma cour aux grands ;  
 Ils sont tous polis, mais indifférents ;  
 Et le séjour des dieux,  
 Pour simple mortel est trop ennuyeux.<sup>1</sup>

One may imagine the chagrin with which she received from the hands of her footman these scathing verses and this unwelcome lesson. Ah, yes ! It cannot be denied that politeness and indifference had but too often been the prevailing note in Madame du Maine's reception of her guests. As for *ennui*, it usually follows in the train of old age, and if Madame du Maine could still amuse herself, did it follow that she was still able to entertain her guests ? Destouches rather harshly took it upon himself to prove to her that it did not. In 1747 even so old a friend of her house as President Hénault had fallen away. On one occasion in the course of that year he had discovered a whole host of reasons to excuse himself from conducting Madame du Deffand to Madame du Maine's, and ever since then the Marquise had been obliged to avail herself of the services of the aged Lassay.

During the half century that the Duchess had queened it in her own domains at Sceaux, she had been but a rare visitor at Court. She dreaded comparisons and preferred to consider herself pre-eminent within her own particular

<sup>1</sup> In peace profound, from Care set free, a nameless philosopher, I concern myself no more with the world but to abuse it as I will. I have paid my court to the great ; they are all polite but indifferent, and the abode of the gods is too wearisome for a mere mortal.





nimbus. As time went on she was seen at Court less and less frequently, but out of regard for her years and parentage, the King used occasionally to visit his aged aunt. On the 7th June 1749 she entertained him at Anet, where, at her command, the honours were done by her sons, who as a rule lived much apart from their mother, wrapt up like regular country squires in the pleasures of hunting and fishing, and avoiding as far as possible the ceremonies connected with her receptions or fêtes. On that day Anet was in its gayest mood, and the two princes did their utmost to make the welcome worthy of the royal guest. At the déjeuner, the Prince des Dombes presented the serviette to the King. The repast over, Louis XV. took horse and went for a canter in the forest of Dreux, leaving his hostess almost alone. Despite her seventy-three years, solitude weighed heavily upon her. It seemed that the time had come for a definite retirement from the world, for setting her spiritual house in order. But for certain defenceless souls, pleasure is a tyrant who, having once gripped them with his talons, keeps fast hold of them till death. Though she saw her end approaching, the Duchess put aside scarcely any of her gaiety. But she began to take more interest in public matters. She established a royal porcelain and pottery manufactory at Sceaux, which was for many years a source of prosperity to the district, and which reached its highest development just before the Revolution. But it was pleasure that was ever first and foremost in her mind; she would weary herself out in the pursuit of it. Voltaire—and this was one of the Duchess's crosses—used to laugh at her from afar as he saw her, despite her weight of years, still endeavouring to divert herself. Having no longer anything to gain from a patroness who was largely forsaken and without influence at Court, he did not hesitate to mingle irony with the admiration he had long expressed for her. On the

18th December 1752 he wrote as follows to the Marquise de Thibouville, one of the *beaux esprits* of Sceaux :

Lay me ever at the feet of the Duchess. She is one of the elect. Till her last moments she will love Comedy, and when she is ill, take my advice and give her a good play instead of Extreme Unction. People die as they have lived. I am dying myself, yet I scribble more verses than La Motte-Houdart.

Voltaire had been a courtier at Sceaux when the play began. He it was who drew the curtain with a sorry jest—it only remained to stow away the properties.

“ Ah, what old men you are ! ” the Princess, who was nearly eighty, would exclaim to her sons when they gently chided her for showing such fondness for pleasure at her time of life. Young she wished to remain, or at all events to fancy herself, to the end. The art of growing old with calmness and dignity was a secret which Madame du Maine, the spoilt child of flattery and fortune, did not possess. From it she would have derived other consolations than those afforded by empty adulation.

The Duc de Luynes and President Hénault have left on record some typical details concerning the closing years of her life. Wherever she went a great crowd of people accompanied her, and everywhere she must needs have her game of cards. Her court had been, as it were, a magic lantern before which all the well-known people of her time had passed. Never did she find the crowd of guests too numerous.

“ The Duchess’s visitors,” says Hénault, “ were rather mixed. There were wits to give sparkle to the conversation, people to play cards, acquaintances, friends both old and new, some men of note, others less in the public eye. The former came to pay their respects from time to time, the latter she received as a matter of habit ; but all found the same elaborate and attentive welcome at her hands, for in her old age she had grown



excessively polite." Polite it may be, but where her real friends were concerned, cold, indifferent and formal. Every evening she gave a grand supper, where it would seem her guests enjoyed but meagre cheer. For some years past reasons of health had made her take her own meals alone. She had put herself on a chicken diet, and her servants always had one on the spit, for they were obliged to send one to her table the very moment she might ask for it. "One day," says Luynes, "they had cooked six before she called for her supper." She ordinarily used to dine at five o'clock in the evening after making her toilet, a ceremony which occupied an inordinate time, as she paid the most minute attention to every detail, using a prodigious amount of rouge. It was then that she was especially inclined to talk, and her guests, when she was able to retain them, used to form a circle round about her.

## CHAPTER XXII

Last illness of the Duchesse du Maine—Her death (23rd January 1753)—The Hôtel Moras—Her obsequies (26th January)—General indifference regarding the event—Ingratitude of Madame du Deffand and the philosophers—Decline of the House of du Maine—The Prince des Dombes—His character—The Comte d'Eu—The Duc de Penthièvre—The end of the Palace of Sceaux—The Pavillon de l'Aurore survives—The château and park at the present day—Pen-portraits of Madame du Maine—A glance at her double existence—Conclusion.

**N**OTWITHSTANDING the numerous apotheoses and gages of immortality that had been granted her, the Blind Fury, to employ her mythological vocabulary, was lying in wait for Ludovise in the midst of her revels. To discover the origin of her malady we must go back to 1741, the year of her daughter's death. Madame de Staal, whose own health was declining, spoke of her mistress with considerable concern in the letters she wrote during that year. We find references to intermittent fever,<sup>1</sup> to an indisposition at Versailles, and so forth. In the following year she writes: "I returned to Sceaux on Friday and found Madame la Duchesse du Maine suffering from a feverish attack and a severe cold. I have been in her room sixteen or seventeen hours on end every day. This sort of life has been extremely trying to me and somewhat thankless, because, only coming on duty at six or seven in the morning I cannot be said to have stayed up with her. . . . I went to Gennevilliers (the Baron de Staal's residence) to

<sup>1</sup> Letter dated 18th March 1741.

learn to dream of Switzerland. I was there a week, and felt all the better for it ; for me it was a veritable land of sleep." Two years later, on the 30th January 1744, Madame de Staal again wrote : " Madame la Duchesse has been indisposed practically the whole time, and it has been impossible for me to go out." And on the 21st May following we read : " She has had several feverish colds one after the other ; this is the fifth, and God grant it may be the last, for this year ! "

In 1750 the Duchess's complaint, a sort of chronic catarrh, grew more acute, and from that time forth, though still flitting about the house and compelling herself to present a smiling face to her guests, she could not throw off her cough, which was caused by an inflamed condition of the lungs. She also complained of trouble in the eyes. In 1751 she took up her quarters in the Hôtel Moras at the corner of the Rue de Varenne and the Boulevard des Invalides. This superb residence, which has come down to us as a type of the ornamental architecture of the eighteenth century, had been purchased by her in 1736, the year of her husband's death, from a Languedoc financier, one Abraham Peyrenc, who had grown rich on Law's system, and become Chief Counsellor to the House of Condé. In these elegant surroundings, of which an excellent account has recently been given to the public,<sup>1</sup> we can once more recognise the Duchess's artistic taste, a taste which left its mark on all her residences. Till the last day of her life she surrounded herself with beautiful things, made to inspire beautiful ideas. It was thus that Art and Nature lent their aid to Intellect.

The façade of the mansion is remarkable for its harmonious simplicity, for the beauty and correctness of its proportions, its consoles and the moulding of its windows. A charming design representing the triumph of Flora

<sup>1</sup> By M. André Hallays, feuilleton des *Débats*, 8th November 1907.

adorns the triangular pediment. On either side of the main building is a projecting wing, each a miracle of graceful and elegant design. This exquisite frontage rises up from a terrace whence the eye may embrace a view of the avenues and gardens. In the eighteenth century these gardens consisted of two parts ; in the one, flower beds of regular design were set amid alleys and quincunxes, while the other was reserved as a kitchen garden and orchard. To the right was an avenue of limes, to the left a superb plantation consisting of nine parallel alleys, and in the centre, shapely parterres were ranged around a circular space, which perhaps had once been a lake.

How delightful and yet how lonely an abode for Madame du Maine ! All the members of that distinguished society which had once been accustomed to gather round her at Sceaux had disappeared ; all save d'Alembert and a few trusty familiars. It was here that there passed quietly away on the 23rd January 1753, at the age of seventy-seven, this last of the daughters-in-law of Louis XIV., the princess whose career had been so brilliant, who for one brief space had nourished the dream of becoming Queen of France, who had solaced her ambition by holding firmly aloft for fifty years the sceptre of a literary sovereignty that none had dared dispute. Despite the presence beneath her roof of a philosopher who dared offer no protest, or whose lips were sealed by the strong will of the dying woman, a priest was summoned to her bedside and, as the report tells, "hastily" administered the sacraments.

Were her two sons, who alone of all her seven children had been spared to her, were they with her at the last ? Who else was present, how did she bear herself, was she conscious till the end ? Did her fiery nature rebel against the tyranny of death, did she manifest that stubborn spirit she had never failed to display whenever her will was thwarted, or did she receive with

Christian calmness and resignation a visitant so different from those she had been wont to welcome in the course of her long sojourn in the gay and heedless world? Did she realise at the hour of death the nothingness of earthly grandeur; did worldly pleasures, those "vanities of vanities," pluck at her garment of flesh and whisper questioningly in her ear, "Dost thou bid us begone?" It would have been well to know. But these last sad echoes of a voice that had been so redoubtable and so caressing by turns, seem to have been swallowed up in the silence of universal indifference. The gazettes of the day are dumb, and none thought it worth while to write down the story of her final moments. This was perhaps her crowning punishment; that she who had so loved to gather round her the brilliant laughter-loving throng, who had been so fond of life and movement should, now that her last hour had come, be left to die unwept, unfriended and alone. Madame du Maine had treated Life as a plaything, and Death mocked at her in his turn. We know not whether she made any distribution of alms ere she went to render her last account; she who had squandered millions on so many extravagances. Neither have we any details regarding her interment. The Duc de Luynes states that the deceased left no commands in the matter, and that it was considered advisable to conduct the obsequies with simplicity. It is possible that simplicity marked the ceremonial that was carried out in the church at Sceaux; details are lacking on the point. Nevertheless, the circumstance would be remarkable, for according to the *Gazette de France* the cortege at least was such as befitted this exalted Princess of the Blood-Royal. Her whole life and the pomp with which she loved to be surrounded all support the probability that she would have desired to be honoured after death as she had been during her lifetime, and that she would have been far

from willing to quit the scene as quietly as the late Duc of more modest memory. Such at all events appears to have been the general assumption, as the following will show.

Her remains, embalmed and placed in a coffin with silver fittings, lay in state upon a raised platform in one of the great reception rooms of the Hôtel Moras, which was brilliantly lighted and hung with mourning, the broad velvet drapery heavily embroidered with coats of arms.

On the 26th January her remains were transferred with great pomp to her Château at Sceaux where she had lived in royal state. The funeral procession attracted an immense crowd of spectators. At the head of the cortège came an equerry robed in a long sable cloak, riding between two state grooms; a hundred pensioners bearing torches and two seneschals mounted on horseback; the officers of the deceased princess on horses caparisoned with black; the ladies-in-waiting in a draped coach drawn by six horses, one hundred and four liveried domestics bearing torches and walking two and two. Then followed the Gentlemen of the Household in a second coach, also draped with black and drawn by six horses, one of them bearing the coronet. Next, in a third coach, and six, came the Bishop of Nantes, the Curé of Saint-Sulpice and the Almoner of the Duchess. The coffin was borne upon a sumptuous hearse, drawn by eight horses. On either side of it rode three pages, torch in hand, clad in long sable cloaks, and immediately preceding the hearse, in a coach drawn by six horses with black trappings, rode the Duchess's *dame d'honneur* and her principal ladies. The coach of the Duchesse de Penthièvre, daughter-in-law of the Comte de Toulouse, brought up the rear. This princess was accompanied by the Comtesse d'Egmont (*née* Villars), whom she had sent to pray and keep watch beside the bier. Luynes

does not omit to remark that the Duchess, in common with the late Duc du Maine, was entitled to be buried with all the special honours appertaining to a princess of the blood, and that on these grounds someone should have been ordered to sprinkle her remains with holy water, and that another princess of the blood should have come to perform this rite in the name of the Queen, but that, in fact, nothing of the sort was done. Oh, puerility of etiquette !

On the arrival of the procession at Sceaux the body was presented to the Curé of the parish by the Bishop of Nantes, and after the customary prayers had been offered, was interred before the High Altar in the family vault. The King, who was at Choisy, returned on the 28th January with the Dauphin and the Princesses. He went into mourning that very day for three weeks in consequence of his aunt's death, which, however, did not prevent him from being present at a supper-party given by the Queen the same evening.

Despite the pomp and circumstance of her obsequies, the death of the aged princess excited but little comment. Little was said about it in the Capital, still less in the provinces. A few, a very few, of her friends and courtiers had followed her remains to Sceaux, where they had passed so many happy hours. No panegyric was pronounced in any of the churches. Massillon was no longer at hand to deliver her funeral oration, as in the case of the Princess Palatine. The clergy made no reference to her. As for the courtiers of Sceaux, not even the most lettered or the most recent among them, such as d'Alembert, considered the occasion worthy of a speech. The feast was over ; the flatterers had sped away. Such is the way of the world. Voltaire himself drew not a single verse from his ink-well to inscribe on her tomb ; this erstwhile parasite of Sceaux never even felt a thrill of cupboard love. Only a few months after the Duchess

died he wrote to Madame du Deffand, telling her about an "infinitely charming Princess of Saxony whose hospitality was greater than that of the Duchesse du Maine."<sup>1</sup>

When all is said and done, the Queen of Sceaux had perhaps proved the superior of Mesdames de Tencin, du Deffand, de Boufflers and de Luxembourg, her contemporaries and her rivals in the world of fashion.

The philosophers of the Diderot school evinced little concern at the passing of one with whose sentiments they were not in sympathy. D'Alembert even went the length of displaying unseemly levity in the matter. Regardless of the friendship that had so long united the Duchess to Madame du Deffand, he had the effrontery to write to the blind Marquise in a strain of ill-timed jocularly. "By the way," he asked, "what sort of a compliment ought one to pay you on the death of Madame la Duchesse du Maine?" adding in an off-hand manner: "Now's the time to publish Madame de Staal's Memoirs!"<sup>2</sup>

It would be vain to look for a single expression of regret in Madame du Deffand's letters. She had recently escaped from Paris to go and rest at Chamrond, and was on her way back again to the capital *viâ* Macon. It was there that she learned what had happened. The tidings were received by her with more or less indifference. For her it meant one tie the less.

The fortunes of the House of du Maine, as well as those of the Palace of Sceaux, their principal stage, were not of long duration. The bold emprise of 1718 had come to nought. The Queen of Sceaux left no traces of her reign behind her, not even within the limits of her little realm of Comedy. The princes born of her marriage with

<sup>1</sup> Voltaire to Mme. du Deffand, Colmar, 23rd April 1754. "Lettres nédites de Mme. du Deffand," vol. ii., p. 24.

<sup>2</sup> D'Alembert to Madame du Deffand (27th January 1753).



the offspring of Louis XIV.'s adulterous union followed her to the grave without having written their names on the scroll of history, the soldier's spirit being all they had inherited of the genius of the Great Condé. Notwithstanding their seven years of campaigning, from 1741 to 1747, they owed their rank as generals almost entirely to the fact that they were princes. Neither took to himself a wife, their father's lot having doubtless disgusted them with matrimony.

Dombes possessed plenty of brains and a good heart, but he took after his mother, and indeed all his ancestors on the maternal side, in having a quick and violent temper. In 1748 he killed the Marquis de Coigny in a duel. The Marquis, who had been beaten at cards, was imprudent enough in a moment of vexation to tell his victorious adversary that a man must be a bastard to have such good luck.<sup>1</sup> Seven years later, on the 1st October 1755, Dombes was carried off at Fontainebleau by an attack of apoplexy. He had prematurely exhausted his vitality by indulgence in every sort of excess. Save in the matter of temper, he had nothing in common with his mother, whom he only survived two years. He preferred evil company to good.<sup>2</sup> "For a whole year before he succumbed," says the Marquis d'Argenson, "the hand of death had been upon him. His system had completely broken down, and, like his grandfather Henri Jules, he had become feeble-minded and subject to fits of violence."

<sup>1</sup> The meeting took place on the Versailles road early in the morning of the 4th March, one of the combatants coming from Versailles and the other from Paris. The spot has ever since been called the "Dawn of Day" in memory of this matutinal encounter. (Bonnassieux, "Histoire de Clagny.")

<sup>2</sup> Himself a lover of the pleasures of the table, he had acquired a certain culinary skill. There was on one occasion some talk of getting him to prepare a dinner for the King ("Mémoires de Luynes," vol. iii., p. 130, 253).

The Comte d'Eu succeeded him in the Barony of Sceaux. Although he had inherited a certain number of his father's official appointments, his household was conducted on a very modest scale. His gentle and open-hearted bearing won him the warm affection of his domestic staff. He had never meddled in politics, and was therefore looked upon at Court as the wisest of princes, polished, unambitious, assiduous in his attentions to the King, yet uncomplainingly accepting the most inconspicuous of rôles. He hunted and fished, gave away money to the poor, and looked after his estates, but never disturbed the solitude of his vast abode by entertaining. In this uneventful fashion he lived on until he was seventy-four, and died a bachelor on the 13th July 1775. As the infirmities of age prevented him from hunting on horseback or on foot, he had a little automatic carriage made in which he could pursue his favourite sport to his heart's content.

Such was the end of the House of du Maine, that parasitic offshoot of the Royal Line of France.

On the death of the Comte d'Eu, his cousin, the Duc de Penthièvre, son of the Comte de Toulouse, succeeded to the château and barony of Sceaux. He carried out many improvements on the property. Upright and beneficent, he atoned for the irregularity of his lineage by the good uses to which he put his wealth, and thus earned the blessings of his vassals. On his death, without issue, which took place in 1793, this famous home of the Colberts, the Seignelayes, and the du Maines was confiscated by the Convention, and sold in the year 1798 to a speculator, who razed it to the ground. It has been replaced by a modern structure in the style of Louis XIII., the property of the Duc de Trévise. The old French gardens have long since disappeared beneath the plough, and it is only from contemporary prints that we are enabled to gain an idea of those wondrous designs of Le Nôtre.

which are so pompously belauded in the *Mercure Galant* of 1740.

Alone of all the original buildings, the Pavillon de l'Aurore has been permitted to survive. Thanks to the courteous hospitality of the present owner, I have been able to visit it and to see it lit up with torches. This mode of illumination still further increased the majesty of its proportions, and permitted me for a brief moment to conjure up to the imagination the gay revels and illustrious men and women of the period. The paintings by Lebrun which decorated its ceilings have been removed to the Hôtel de Trévisé in the Rue Hamelin, Paris. The magnificent library of Sceaux was put up to auction about the year 1850. Bibliophiles account themselves in luck's way on the rare occasions when they pick up a volume belonging to the little Duchess's own collection. All her books were bound in red morocco, and stamped on the covers with the device of the Honey Bee. She desired that even her book-covers should enshrine her memory's piquant charm.

"A public ball-room now occupies the site of what was once the *ménagerie*," so Madame Arvède Barine tells us,<sup>1</sup> wittily adding that the place has undergone no change, inasmuch as dancing and singing still go on in those regions where Frolic reigned so long supreme, and where Florian continued the pastoral idylls of the Duchess. At all events the cult of historic association is maintained at the château, and vestiges of the former house and grounds are readily pointed out to the visitor, more especially the park, restored according to Le Nôtre's plans, with its grand canal, its statues, its waterfalls, its little château, besides other souvenirs of the Duchesse du Maine.

The Duchess was often portrayed by the painter's brush and the etcher's needle, but her presentments

<sup>1</sup> "Princesses et grandes dames."

must be interpreted in the light of what her contemporaries wrote about her. Saint-Simon, a past-master in the art of literary portraiture, thus describes her: "She is no taller than a child of ten, and not well proportioned. Her teeth are irregular, she is not very fat, powders and paints a great deal, has fine eyes, a fair complexion, fair hair, and fat cheeks a great deal too red." Duclos exaggerates and goes so far as to call her a "little deformity." The paintings of the period give us quite a different idea.

As we have seen in the course of this narrative, Madame du Maine was of uncertain humour, haughty in manner, and, during her youth, unconstrained towards the King, almost disrespectful to her father, and quite disdainful of her husband, whom she ostentatiously defied on every possible occasion.<sup>1</sup> Devoted to social and literary pleasures, she had tasted every one of those delights in which vanity and *amour-propre* find their satisfaction.

Although her impetuous nature was lacking in balance, she possessed a charm of manner which she could employ with effect when she felt disposed. First and foremost among the characteristics by which we remember her is her literary sense. To the day of her death she retained this intellectual sovereignty which Monsieur Caro declares to be more flattering than any other sort of pre-eminence to a woman whose charms are on the wane. Her quick, alert, ready intelligence which she cultivated and developed to make it the minister of her capricious instincts, has received the guerdon of renown, and assures her a place of honour among the celebrities of the eighteenth century, albeit, unlike Mademoiselle de Montpensier, she has left no memoirs behind her. Her letters with their malice and their preciosity are gay and amusing. Though she confined herself for the most part to literature of the exquisite and airily playful

<sup>1</sup> Barrière, "Avant-propos des Mémoires de Mme. de Staal."

vein, she illumined in the wits of her day an unquenchable flame of lighter verse, nay, even some of Voltaire's tragedies owe their inspiration to her. She was a capable critic, and fulfilled the functions of arbiter in the literary disputes at Sceaux, where her opinion always carried the day. People were won over by her impetuous gaiety, and that which La Fontaine wrote concerning the Duchesse de Bouillon might have been said with equal appropriateness of her—

Vous portez en tous lieux la joie et les plaisirs ;  
Allez en des climats inconnus aux zéphirs :  
Les champs se vêtiront de rose.<sup>1</sup>

The person who was best able to judge of Madame du Maine, having dwelt with her longer than any one else, was Madame de Staal. Though her description of the Duchess is penned in rather caustic vein, it would appear to be worthy of retention as being the most true to life. Rose de Launay had been in a position to make a constant study of her mistress and to read her heart. She ascribes to her the faults and attractions of a clever but spoilt child, inquisitive and knowing, but withal superficial in her various acquirements. We must quote a few lines from this choice and delicately written psychological fragment :

The decisions of the people who brought her up are for her rules and principles concerning which her mind has never conceived the smallest doubt ; she placed herself under the yoke once and for all. Her stock of ideas is made up. She would reject the most perfectly demonstrated truths, the most cogent arguments, did they conflict with her received impressions. She is too frivolous to examine a question thoroughly and too weak to endure an attitude of philosophic doubt. Her

<sup>1</sup> Everywhere you go you bear with you joy and pleasure. Even if you went to regions where the zephyrs are unknown, the fields would grow rosy with blossom.

catechism and her Descartes are two systems which she understands equally well. The idea she has of herself is a preconceived notion, like all her other opinions. She believes in herself just as she believes in God and Descartes, without question and without discussion. Her mirror has never inspired her with the slightest misgiving regarding her good looks, and the witness of her own eyes is in her view less worthy of credence than the judgment of those who have pronounced her fair and well proportioned. Her vanity is of a singular order. Being unconscious, it should, one would think, be the less noticeable, whereas in reality it is rendered thereby only the more absurd.<sup>1</sup>

Thereafter we are introduced to all her childish faults, her religion without piety, her multifarious smatterings "without any real knowledge," and all the other shortcomings of her curious character. "There is no such thing as conversing with her; she does not worry about being understood, all she desires is to be listened to."

From Madame de Staal we learn that most of the faults which are indiscernible in other people were displayed in all their nakedness by the Duchess. Four or five generations of pleasure-hunters such as she, culminated in that brood of thoughtless but brave and witty aristocrats who were responsible for the follies of the Emigration. In default of a more exalted throne Madame du Maine was content to take her seat on one she had elevated for herself. This two-sided existence of hers had, as its points of attraction, intellect and ambition, and for connecting link between them an overweening egoism as deeply entrenched in the political as in the private arena. One would have wished to discover in the writings and conversation of Madame du Maine more of the milk of human kindness and less sensitiveness, a few Christian ideas instead of so much pagan phraseology, some real feeling in place of that showy mythology, those stilted theatrical gallantries all designed for effect.

<sup>1</sup> "Mémoires de Mme. de Staal."

A princess before everything (since queenship was denied her) and haughty towards the humble, she yet knew how to be generous because, in the words of the Marquise de Lambert, she recognised that "liberality is one of the duties of the nobly born." She scattered gold about her and loved to surround herself with happy people.

"If," wrote the Princess Palatine, her sworn enemy, "she were as kind-hearted as she is mischievous, there would be nothing to say against her." And since, in spirit, Madame du Maine is to some extent the disciple of Mademoiselle de Scudéry, whose romances she had devoured, the words which the author of 'Cyrus the Great' wrote to Madame de Longueville might also be employed regarding the latter's great-niece.

Dare I say it, Mademoiselle? The greater number of persons in your rank of life lack one vital quality, namely, kindness of heart. They are born amid such brilliant surroundings that they themselves are dazzled, and the flatterers who attend them corrupt their good inclinations, persuade them that they are no longer as we are, that they must be guided by different rules and that kindness is a plebeian virtue which should never be permitted any proximity with thrones and palaces.

Madame la Duchesse du Maine, the celebrated Queen of Sceaux, very much in love with science and *belles-lettres* after the fashion of the *beaux esprits* of her day, possessed the talent of drawing to her side, and retaining around her for more than half a century, the most polished grands seigneurs of the ultra-elegant school and the most renowned manufacturers of literature *à la mode*. Her court was very much alive, very brilliant and unceasingly open to the most refined of pleasures, and herein lies her true merit, we may almost say her glory. She gave society its tone, and a good tone it was if we are to compare the manners and customs that prevailed at Sceaux with the orgies that went on at the Palais-Royal during the Regency, and the *Saturnalia* of Versailles

in the days of La Pompadour and du Barry. Her world was Sceaux and Anet, or rather it was herself, for it was in herself that all her pleasures were wrapt up. The rest of her family scarcely existed for her; before them all she placed the wits and scholars who formed her entourage. Her connection with politics had been but a brief untoward episode in her existence. She had long since thoroughly repented of a youthful error in which she had displayed side by side with much energy and initiative a plentiful lack of calmness and common-sense. The manner in which she had conducted her little revolution had been more reminiscent of Mademoiselle de Scudéry than of La Grande Mademoiselle.

The influence of her Court on eighteenth century literature was not so great as one might be led to imagine from the large number of distinguished people who thronged to Sceaux. Certainly Madame du Maine's judgments were authoritative; even Voltaire respected them. But her coterie was too esoteric, too precious to inspire a school. It was marked by no depth or beauty of sentiment, it was distinguished by no soaring ideals. Nothing was there that recalled the great writers of the seventeenth century. There is a suggestion of artificiality and constraint about these so-called *impromptus*, these would-be spontaneous ebullitions of gaiety.

Apart from Voltaire, who began his career at Sceaux and became the intellectual beacon of his age, those who peopled the Court of the Duchess possessed on the whole but talents of second-rate merit. It was indeed a club rather than a home of literature, and the good taste to which it laid claim was not invariably a reality. Its character has been well summed up by a descendant of that aged admirer of the Duchess, the Marquis de Sainte-Aulaire.<sup>1</sup> "When we consider this Court of

<sup>1</sup> Introduction to the "Correspondance de Mme. du Deffand," vol. xl.



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*J. Bouchard fecit.*  
Madame la Marquise de Pompadour.  
*J. Watteau fecit.*  
Morte En 1764

C C C C C C C C C C C C  
C C C C C C C C C C C C  
C C C C C C C C C C C C  
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C C C C C C C C C C C C  
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Sceaux, its pretentious futilities, its always more or less licentious preciosity, and then turn our thoughts to Rambouillet with its stately converse, its refinement, its purity of sentiment, we are struck with the contrast between the two centuries and with the truth of the saying that the false taste of decadence is a far worse thing than the false taste of barbarism." Decadence! That is the word that sums up the Court of Sceaux.

With regard to Madame du Maine's own life, her greatest misfortune was probably the ill-assorted union she had been compelled to contract while yet a child. It was not until afterwards that she was able to gauge, with the pride of a genuine princess, the gulf that separates a legitimate from an illegitimate prince. When the scales fell from her eyes it was too late to repair the error. She realised with stupefaction that there are stains which nothing can wash away. This was the hidden rock which wrecked her married life. Her nature rose up in revolt. She mastered her weak-willed consort, and thenceforth there was nothing to restrain her own wild extravagances. When in 1717 the Duc du Maine was stript of his prerogatives as a Prince of the Blood by a decree of the Regency Council, this daughter of the race of Condé drew her diminutive person up to its full height, and said as she surveyed him with a scornful glance: "All that remains to me then is the shame of having married you." In that single indignant outburst is gathered up the whole of her story. The Duchess never consoled herself for contracting a union which she always regarded as a *mésalliance*.

As I bring to a close this study of an eighteenth century *grande dame*, who, besides being the grand-daughter of one of the most illustrious men of modern times, was brought by her marriage so near to a throne that for a brief moment she thought to be a queen, it seems to me as though I have been setting on its appointed shelf

in a cabinet an antique Dresden shepherdess purchased at a dealer's. To dust it with care, to gaze at it meditatively in a good light, now full face and now in profile, has been a pleasant task. Yet, after all, as I let my thoughts dwell on this little, dainty, blue-eyed porcelain figure that my imagination has conjured up, of what does it speak to me but of mock grandeur, of a petty mind, of a soul devoured by ambition and of the selfish heart of a princess whose ideals never soared beyond the confines of her miniature court; and lo, even as I gaze, I am conscious of some loss of respect for this factitious celebrity, so typical and so eloquent of her times. There then as she stands in her glass case, tricked out in all her ornaments and finery, I take a final leave of my little modish lady with her painted face. She has availed to awake in me just that measure of curious interest which she was entitled to inspire. After all, 'tis but a doll, a plaything, a piece of bric-a-brac, something for a collector to rhapsodise over, and I, in order to distract my vision from such a trifle and to bring it to bear on a scene which redeems the seventeenth century from all its frivolity, am fain to call to mind those heroes who fought so gallantly at Fontenoy. Patriotism and bravery; such have ever had the final say where the French people are concerned, and this is particularly true of the Bourbons their leaders; nor, despite all that has been written, were these qualities lacking in the Duc du Maine.

# APPENDICES

## No. 1

### MARRIAGE CONTRACT OF THE DUC DU MAINE

*18th March 1692.*

PRESENT: The Most High, Most Mighty and Most Excellent Prince Louis, by the Grace of God, King of France and Navarre, on behalf of the Most High and Mighty Prince Louis Auguste de Bourbon Duc du Maine, his natural and legitimated son, Colonel in Chief of the Swiss and Grisons, Governor and Lieutenant General for His Majesty in Languedoc, General of the Galleys, of the one part ;

The Most High and Mighty Prince Henry Jules de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, Prince of the Blood, Peer and Grand-Master of France, Duc d'Anguien et de Châteauroux ; the High and Mighty Princess Anne Palatine of Bavaria, consort of the said Lord and Prince, by him authorized for the purposes of these presents, acting on behalf of the Most High and Mighty Princess Louise Bénédicte de Bourbon, their daughter, of the other part.

Also present :—

Mgr. le Dauphin, the Dukes of Burgundy, of Anjou and Berry ; Monsieur, the Brother of the King ; the Princess Palatine, Elisabeth Charlotte Duchess of Orléans.

The Duc de Chartres and his wife (Marie Françoise de Bourbon).

The Princess Elisabeth Charlotte d'Orléans.

The Princess Marguerite Louise d'Orléans, Grand Duchess of Tuscany.

The Princess Isabella of Orléans, Duchess of Guise.

Prince Louis de Bourbon, Prince of the Blood, Peer and Grand Master of France, Governor of Burgundy. His wife Louise Françoise de Bourbon, legitimated princess.

The Princess de Conti (Marie Anne de Bourbon) also legitimated.

François Louis de Bourbon, Prince de Conti. Princess Thérèse de Bourbon, his spouse.

The Princess Marie Anne de Bourbon.

The Prince Louis Alexandre de Bourbon.

The Comte de Toulouse, legitimated Prince and Admiral of France, Governor of Guyenne, and the Princess Charlotte Séguier, Widow of Prince Henry de Bourbon, legitimated Prince of France and Duc de Vendôme.

## No. 2

### THE MARQUIS DE LASSAY ON THE DUC AND DUCHESSÉ DU MAINE

The body and mind of Madame la Duchesse du Maine have suffered the same fate. They have both been arrested at the stage of development which we generally associate with children of twelve; and though the Duchess is twenty-nine, she is still a child; clever, it is true, but possessing all the intolerable characteristics of children that are spoilt and never corrected. She follows her careless and fantastic whims regardless of duty or decorum and never gives a thought to what may come of her actions. The pleasure of the moment is all she cares about and the power of those about her to minister thereto is the measure of her regard for them. In a word she is a twelve-year-old child, and Malézieu has obtained such mastery over her mind

that he not only makes her speak and act as he likes but he even directs her thoughts, and her judgment of men and matters is governed by what he tells her about them. When she maintains an opinion—which she does with far too much vivacity, though with artless eloquence and in fairly well-chosen language—it is easy to see that she is merely repeating what he has taught her, particularly where science is in question ; so that I always feel inclined to cry out “ Pretty Poll,” while all the rest of the company are admiring the Princess’ great wit and learning.

In spite of the influence he wields over her—and she dreads him like fire—she is just as obstinate as a child, when she gets a whim into her head. He then finds it necessary to wheedle her a little and this worries him rather. He never lets her out of his sight and always has some members of his family or others of his myrmidons about her. A great many people think there is some love-affair between them, but I am certain that she only looks upon him as children do on their nurses, and that we need not read into Madame du Maine’s enthusiasm or Malézieu’s extreme assiduity, any other cause than the childishness of the one and the vast importance for the other of maintaining an ascendancy on which his influence and his fortunes alike depend. It is not that Madame du Maine is a coquette, but she likes very young people, and Malézieu’s face is so frightful that I cannot imagine anyone falling in love with him. For the rest he is a madman with a deal of imagination, nay, of wit. He is insolent, vain, and an excessive liar ; he speaks authoritatively and contradicts with effrontery. However, he makes an impression on a number of people. He knows nothing about society or society’s ways, and one can easily see that he is a nobody by birth and that he has not been accustomed to live with quite first-rate people.

In order to complete your idea of the family I must not forget to tell you that M. le Duc du Maine's mind is more halting and awry than his body ; he is a weak man, weaker than you can imagine, uncouth, shy, devout, and made to be ruled, and thoroughly ruled he is, by his wife and by Malézieu, who is absolute master of the house. It is useless for Monsieur and Madame du Maine to desire to do good to anyone or to render a service ; they never act save on behalf of the favourites of the day, the friends of Malézieu, who represents grace abounding, while Monsieur du Maine personifies grace sufficing.

## No. 3

MADAME DE MAINTENON TO THE PRINCESSE DES URSINS

SAINT-CYR, 30th *January* 1707.

Madame la Duchesse du Maine is delighting the whole Court by the performances she is giving of all kinds of plays. Her company is better than any of the others ; M. de Gondrin is one of the best actors in it. Only Madame la Duchesse d'Orléans and Madame la Duchesse are excluded, because Madame la Duchesse du Maine says they would laugh at her. For my part I confess I should never laugh at her, and that I consider such pleasures more harmless and more clever than tuining oneself at *lansquenet* or spoiling one's health by drinking, eating, and smoking. My only desire, considering the present position of affairs, would be to curtail expenses a little at Clagny.

VERSAILLES, 12th *December* 1714.*(The same to the same.)*

They are playing *Athalie* at Sceaux to-day ; you know what a beautiful thing it is and they say it will be played



to perfection. There are some ex-comedians who are acting with Madame du Maine. La Beauval will have the part of Athalie, Baron that of Mathan, while M. de Malézieu will be the High Priest ; Madame du Maine, Josabeth ; the Comte d'Eu, the little King, etc.

(La Beauval had been in Molière's company and Baron also. He had "created" Ariste in *Les Femmes savantes*. Author of "l'Homme à bonnes fortunes Geffroy II.," III.)

## No. 4

PETITION PRESENTED TO THE KING BY THE  
LEGITIMATED PRINCES

1717.

SIRE,

Louis Auguste de Bourbon, Duc du Maine, and Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, Comte de Toulouse, legitimated princes of your blood, remind Your Majesty that the late King of glorious memory, your great grandfather, having by an Edict, dated 1714, nominated them as successors to the Crown in default of all the lawful princes of your blood, also ordained, by the same Edict, and by a declaration of the 23rd May 1715, that they should enjoy in Parliament and in other places all such honours as are enjoyed by the princes of your blood, and that they should be permitted to assume their rank and quality. Louis Henry, Duc de Bourbon, Prince de Condé, Charles de Bourbon, Comte de Charollais, and Louis Armand de Bourbon, Prince de Conty, princes of your blood, have presented a petition to Your Majesty, asking that the said Edict and Declaration should be revoked and annulled by your Bed of Justice. This request is made on two grounds. The one has reference to the succession to the Crown, the other to the permission to assume the quality of prince of the blood and the right

of enjoying all such honours as are enjoyed by the princes of the blood. With regard to the honours and to the title granted to ourselves and to our posterity, this is a favour proceeding from the will of the late King, the sovereign-master in all questions of rank and such distinctions within his kingdom ; whereas, touching the succession to the Crown, it is plain that the matter is one which concerns the nation alone, and, as no one has the right to speak in the name of the nation, and as the nation cannot deliberate on questions affecting its interests save when the National Assembly has been convened in accordance with law, therefore, Sire, may it please Your Majesty to reject the request of the princes of the blood, not only with regard to the Edict of the month of July 1714, but also to the Declaration of the 23rd May 1715, so soon as you shall have attained your majority ; or in the event of your deeming it expedient to come to a decision during your minority, to make no pronouncement on the question of the succession to the Crown until the States General of the kingdom, lawfully assembled, shall have deliberated on the interest which the nation may have in the provisions of the late King's Edict concerning the succession to the Crown, and whether it is expedient and advantageous for it to demand its revocation.

*Signed :* LOUIS AUGUSTE DE BOURBON.

LOUIS ALEXANDRE DE BOURBON.

### No. 5

#### REPLY OF THE PRINCES OF THE BLOOD TO THE FOREGOING PETITION

*Signed :* LOUIS HENRY DE BOURBON.  
LOUIS AMAND DE BOURBON.

CHARLES DE BOURBON.

*Conclusion*

Wherefore, Sire, may it please Your Majesty to revoke and annul in your Bed of Justice the Edict of July 1714, which grants to Louis Auguste de Bourbon, Duc du Maine, and to Louis Alexandre de Bourbon, Comte de Toulouse, and to their descendants, the right of succession to the Crown; as well as the provisions of the Declaration of the 23rd March 1715, which confers on them the title, honours, and rank of princes of the blood.

They demand that the right of succession to the Crown be vested solely in the princes lawfully begotten to the Royal House of France.

They are unable to admit that there is no distinction between the lawful princes and those who have been declared legitimate.

No one is ignorant that lawful wedlock is the only source of princes of the blood in the Royal Family of France.

The fact that no protest was made at a time when, under an absolute monarch, such a claim would not have been heard, cannot prejudice the laws of the kingdom.

## No. 6

SECOND DECLARATION OF MADAME LA DUCHESSE DU  
MAINE

M. de Pompadour acts by himself and has concealed many things from Madame. He was certainly aware that a number of people, of whose names he was not ignorant, were carrying on negotiations with the Ambassador, but he never mentioned it to Madame.

M. de Laval's memorial, which was carried by the Abbé Porto-Carrero, had reference to practically the same

designs as the scheme of M. de Pompadour, but it was very involved ; what was clear, however, is that it assured the King of Spain that he could count on several provinces as well as on a number of regiments which he named, such as the Carabiniers, the Swiss and others, though no one else in the world was aware of it. He made all these statements recklessly, and consequently Madame la Duchesse du Maine was in despair when she learned that the document had been sent. She is not sure that it was sent with the contents as stated, Laval having sent word to her subsequently that several alterations had been made. Madame du Maine thinks that if it was revised it was by the Abbé Brigaut. She is also persuaded that it was the same Abbé who drew up the other documents.

Madame la Duchesse du Maine has no doubt that the Comte Dedis was aware of all the plans, and that he was deeply implicated in this affair, having learned since her departure that he was forever at the Spanish Ambassador's, and having seen from a printed letter of the Ambassador's that two men were recommended to Cardinal Alberoni, which two men could be no other than M. le Comte Dedis and M. de Saint Geniès. There can be no doubt that Monsieur de Pompadour was aware of it since the Ambassador states that the principal author of our designs urged me, some few months back, to transmit to your Excellency the attached letter, and to accompany it with the most lively expressions of his eagerness to be of service. And elsewhere he says : " The proposal has been made to me that I should introduce to His Majesty's service, M——, a person of quality."

The chief author of the plans, according to Madame la Duchesse du Maine, is M. de Pompadour, at all events there would appear to be no room for doubt that M. de Laval, M. de Pompadour, and the Abbé Brigaut are the " workmen " that he has in mind ; since, then, none

of them ever made mention to Madame la Duchesse du Maine of the two men spoken of by the Ambassador to Cardinal Alberoni, it is perfectly plain that many things were done without her knowledge.

Madame la Duchesse du Maine knew that Saint-Geniès had been brought into the affair by M. de Pompadour, and that the latter was at great pains to conceal it from her and to prevent her knowing anything about it ; which proves that many other things besides were hidden from her. She only learned of it indirectly.

Madame la Duchesse du Maine remembers M. de Laval coming to see her one morning in Paris for a moment, and telling her that Cardinal Alberoni had sent a message to the Ambassador, bidding him *put the irons in the fire*, that is to say, to gather together the people who were in favour of the King of Spain, for the purpose of forming a regular party. He added that he would be going to the Ambassador's with Monsieur de Pompadour in a few days, and that he would afterwards send an account of the matter to Madame la Duchesse du Maine. As the Ambassador was arrested in the meantime, these gentlemen did not visit him.

## No. 7

## AN ORDER OF DUBOIS

January 1719.

Interrogate the Abbé Brigault and the other prisoners on sundry documents which the Spanish Ambassador sent to Cardinal Alberoni by a special messenger on the 26th May 1718, subsequent to the date on which the reply to Fitz-Morris, of which the Abbé Brigault claims the authorship, appeared. The said dispatch of the 26th May contained :—

1. *Una lunga e ben ordinata scrittura*, in which were gathered together all the arguments that would tend to

make the proposed treaty of peace appear unjust and evil, the measures to be adopted by the King of Spain in refusing it, the invalidity of the renunciations, and the right of the King of Spain to the Crown of France.

2. Another document in the form of a letter designed to inform the public of the disorders in France.

3. A document entitled: Reflections on the treaty proposed for the signature of the King of Spain. The Ambassador then wrote: "Someone who saw the King of Spain quite disinterestedly and at great risk, is of opinion that it would be well to show some favour to the Prince de Chalais."

On the 30th July, the Ambassador again dispatched by an express two documents, Nos. 1 and 2, on the disorders of the kingdom, and a further document—No. 3—containing the remedies proposed in the name of the nation, with several authentic signatures, to be forwarded to the King of Spain.

4. A manifesto in the name of the King of Spain.

5. Draft of a letter from the King of Spain to the Parliament.

6. Draft of a letter from the King of Spain to the King.

7. As these documents have a close connection with those that were finally intercepted, it might be well to ask what differences there were between the first memorials that were dispatched on the 30th July and those which were intercepted.

The Declaration of M. le Duc du Maine—It will be well to get a statement from the accused on this matter—whence it came into their hands, and with what purpose it was sent.

#### No. 8

#### THE DUCHESS OF ORLEANS TO MADAME DE MAINTENON

Parliament had conceived the beautiful plan, if my son had delayed another twenty-four hours, of making

the Duc du Maine Regent of France, declaring the King of age, and making the Duc superintendent of the whole direction of affairs ; but my son discomfited them. He removed the Duc du Maine from the King and degraded him from his rank. The Chief President is said to have been seized with such terror that he is still as petrified as though he had seen the head of Medusa ; but Medusa herself could not be in a greater fury than the Duchesse du Maine. She breaks out into horrible threats, and has been publicly heard to declare that means would certainly be found to make the Regent bite the dust. It is thought that the old wasp is secretly intriguing with its pupil.

## No. 9

THE DUCHESS D'ORLÉANS TO MADAME DE MAINTENON

SAINT-CLOUD, *August 1718.*

I am this morning going to Paris, where there is a great uproar. My son has caused the King to hold a Bed of Justice ; he has summoned the whole Parliament and formally enjoined them in the King's name not to interfere in the government, but to confine themselves to their special prerogatives of administering justice and conducting trials. The new Keeper of the Seals has been installed, and as it is a matter of positive knowledge that the Duc du Maine and his wife are stirring up the Parliament against the King and my son, he (the Duc du Maine) has been relieved of the guardianship of the King's person, which duties have been handed over to M. le Duc. He and his children have been deprived of their rights as princes of the blood, but his younger brother, who has always conducted himself well and honourably, has been suffered to retain all his rights. The Parliament folk and the Duchesse du Maine are so

furious with my son that I am in constant fear of their having him assassinated. The Duchess says the most revolting things. Once, at table, she declared: "They say I am urging Parliament to revolt against the Duc d'Orléans; but I despise him too much to take such a lofty revenge upon him. I shall be able to avenge myself differently from that!" You see what a Fury the woman is, and how I have good reason to be in continual dread as to what may happen.

## No. 10

PETITION PRESENTED BY THE STATES-GENERAL OF HIS  
CATHOLIC MAJESTY TO THE KING OF SPAIN

(*Drawn up at Sceaux.*)

SIRE,

All classes in the Kingdom of France cast themselves at Your Majesty's feet to beseech your aid in the plight to which they have been reduced by the present government. You are not unaware of their misfortunes, but you do not as yet recognise them in their full extent, etc. . . . It is literally true, Sire, that no payments are made save the soldiers' pay and the municipal *rentes*, for reasons which are easy to fathom. As for the officers, of whatever rank they may be, and for the pensions which they have earned with their blood, there is no longer even a thought of paying them.

The public have experienced no benefit either from the increased coinage or from the taxes exacted from the financiers. The same contributions are now demanded as were levied by the late King during the most protracted wars.

Finally, Sire, laws are no longer recognised. Those edicts which render sacrosanct the memory of your Royal ancestors are overturned by a mere *lettre de cachet*.



No. 10A.

## PHILIP V. TO LOUIS XV.

The remedy? It is in Your Majesty's hands.

Although the last four of these documents have been suppressed, those that have seen the light should make too great an impression on the public for any surprise to be manifested at the treatment meted out to Cellamare, or at the Regent's mildness. The papers were merely examined in his presence and paraphrased by the Ambassador. Three cases were filled with them and taken to the Louvre where they remain deposited, pending the arrival of two confidential messengers dispatched by the King of Spain to lay formal claim to them.

Your clergy, your nobles, and your people are drained dry in order to pay for troops destined for my ruin and your own.

Treaties the very importance of which should prevent their being concluded during a minority and without the nation's opinions being taken, are brought forward in your Regency Council as though they had been already decided upon.

I urgently beg your Majesty instantly to convene the States-General of your Realm in order to deliberate upon a matter of such great consequence. I address this prayer to you in the name of the family bond which unites us.

The Assembly which forms the subject of my request will prevent the unhappy complications in which we may otherwise find ourselves entangled.

The forces of Spain will only be employed to uphold the greatness of France and to humiliate her enemies.

PHILIPPE.

THE ROYAL MONASTERY OF SAINT LAURENT,

*3rd September 1718.*

## NO. II

DUBOIS TO THE DUC DE SAINT-AIGNAN

*November 1718.*

It is His Majesty's intention, Monsieur, that M. le Prince de Cellamare should leave Paris, and that he should set out on his homeward journey on Monday the 12th of this month. If he desires to halt at Blois for a while on his way, His Royal Highness will allow him to do so. His papers shall be scrupulously kept under his own seal, and he will be permitted to leave behind him a responsible person, in whose presence and by whose agency they shall be examined, if it is found necessary and indispensable to submit them to scrutiny.

I am, Monsieur, etc. etc.

*(Unsigned.)**Saturday, 10th December 1718.*

## NO. 12

FOUCAUD TO THE DUC DE SAINT-AIGNAN

*(Paris to Madrid.)**10th December 1718.*

I am fulfilling my undertaking to keep you informed of important news with the greater pleasure in that I am extremely eager to beg of you the continuation of your friendship during the prolonged period I am obliged to be absent.

On the 10th, the Spanish Ambassador was arrested by order of M. d'Orléans. M. le Blanc and M. l'Abbé Dubois were entrusted with the task of effecting the arrest, and proceeded to his house in the carriage of the first named. A close watch is kept upon him in his house. His chief secretary has been arrested and all his papers have been seized. By a miraculous coincidence letters

were discovered among the belongings of a certain bankrupt who was on his way to Spain, which disclosed to His Royal Highness one of the biggest conspiracies there have been for some time. Horrible things were read out at an extraordinary meeting of the Regency Council. M. de Pompadour, Saint-Geniès, and M. Greder have been arrested with several others. The prisoners about whom you have heard were in the pay of Spain, and had not this fortunate discovery been made, it was intended to aim at expelling the Regent and changing the face of affairs in France. Many nobles are mixed up in the affair. His Royal Highness is to issue a public manifesto. I shall receive it at the earliest moment and will inform you of the details. We await the arrival of the couriers with the greatest impatience—people hope every day to discover something further regarding this great enterprise. . . .

## No. 13

“Confidential.”

*For His Excellency Mgr. Alberoni in person.*

Nothing is more important than to make sure of the places near the Pyrenees and of the nobles who are resident in those parts.

The garrison of Bayonne should be won over or overpowered.

The Marquis de T—— is Governor of D——. The intentions of this nobleman are known; when he has decided to act he should treble his expenditure to bring in the noblesse. He should scatter presents with a lavish hand.

In Normandy, Carentan is an important post. The Governor of this place should be dealt with in the same manner as the Marquis de T——. Go still further and promise them any rewards they may ask.

Act in a similar manner in all the provinces.

To meet expenses we should be able to reckon on 300,000 livres the first month, and afterwards one hundred thousand livres per month, paid punctually.

This outlay, which will cease when peace is restored, places the Catholic King in a position to act with confidence in case of war.

Spain is merely an auxiliary. Philip V.'s real army is in France. A body of ten thousand Spaniards is more than sufficient with the King there.

But we must count on winning over at least half of the Duc d'Orléans' army. That is the decisive point and that cannot be managed without money. What is necessary is that one hundred thousand livres should be distributed among every battalion and every squadron.

Twenty battalions make two millions. With that amount we could build up a sure army and destroy the enemy's forces.

*(Memorandum copied by Buvat.)*

No. 14

LETTER ADDRESSED TO MGR. LE PRINCE DE CELLAMARE, AMBASSADOR OF SPAIN, AT BLOIS, BY A SECRET EMISSARY

PARIS, 15<sup>th</sup> December 1718.

He has received offers from . . . who is very much disposed to give a fall to the Duc d'Orléans and to do him an ugly turn. And from others—offering the King of Spain 25,000 men armed and fully supplied, the whole to overthrow the Duc d'Orléans and his family and to keep the kingdom for the King of Spain, in case the good King Louis XV. should die. France would fain rend him and she awaits the help of the king our master to whom she is stretching forth her arms.

You know what this saintly man has been so good

as to tell us?—that he would not complete the Regency because God, who had already rejected him from the Church, would soon destroy him.

As these two princes,<sup>1</sup> whose secret letters I possess, have had experience of the truth of this man's predictions, they look upon the Regent as one unworthy to live, but they endure him in order that they may destroy him the sooner. These two princes have promised me that they would speak of the matter to nobody; do you likewise. I am writing you by post as I have been assured that letters are not opened. I am setting out to visit this venerable man who is in the country, a league away from Paris.

## No. 15

## CELLAMARE'S PROTEST

Letter from the Ambassador of Spain to the Most Christian King regarding his arrest at the Court of Paris.

Don Vincent Porto Carrero, the Comte de Montijo's brother, desiring to post from this Court to that of Madrid, I availed myself of the opportunity to entrust him with a large sealed packet of letters for Cardinal Alberoni, wherein I was sending to the King my master several papers handed to me by persons of distinction, and containing various proposals which had appeared necessary for the service of Your Majesty and for the general well-being of your Crown.

These dispatches having been sent off through D. Vincent Porto Carrero, it came about that having passed a night at Poitiers, he and his companions were assailed next morning by a troop of grenadiers with fixed bayonets, and that having identified him and dragged him from his bed, they took from him in the roughest and most

<sup>1</sup> The Duc de Maine and the Comte de Toulouse.

unseemly manner, not only the packet but all the other papers which he had with him, whether belonging to himself or to others ; telling him, in order to lend some pretext and colour to such unjust violence, that they were in search of the papers of a merchant who had fled from England.

It was the day before yesterday that I was made acquainted for the first time with this disagreeable news, and I forthwith laid the matter before the Abbé Dubois, demanding of him the restoration of the papers and satisfaction for the insult. After a great display of affected politeness, he gave my secretary a note yesterday morning for M. le Blanc. It was, he said, from the Duc d'Orléans, and contained an order for the return of the papers. My secretary immediately went to M. le Blanc, who said that he had received orders from the Regent's own lips to deliver the papers into my own hands in the presence of the said secretary, and that we could therefore go to him at one o'clock in the afternoon. This I did punctually, without any useless trouble about etiquette, and when I expected that the promise would be kept and that I should obtain my papers, whom did I discover there but M. l'Abbé Dubois with M. le Blanc. Thereupon they, without being able to charge me with misdeeds that I had not committed, conveyed me, together with the aforesaid secretary, to my residence, accompanied by several military officers, who, with a detachment of Your Majesty's Musketeers, took possession of every nook and corner of my house. Thereafter, in the presence of two Secretaries of State, they seized all the papers, public and private, of my Embassy, as well as those of my two predecessors, the Duc d'Albe and the Marquis de Castel Rios. They placed a seal upon them, and handed them over to the Musketeers for safe custody.

Such, Sire, are the circumstances in which I find myself arrested, shut up as a prisoner in my own house

and surrounded by guards. My secretary, who is also of the Embassy, has been similarly arrested and his papers publicly seized, as has already been set forth.

But since the sincere, precise, and truthful account of the proceeding is sufficient clearly to demonstrate its injustice, I will simply take the liberty of explaining to Your Majesty that, in this case, the law of nations has been infringed and doubly violated—first, by the interception and opening of the private and sealed dispatches of an Ambassador, papers addressed to the King his master by the hands of a responsible and public minister; secondly, by this latter proceeding of arresting his person, adding to violence the trickery of deceiving him, and leading him on with feigned promises of giving him back all his papers.

Everyone is aware, it has indeed been decided on several occasions, that the powers of a just King who mistrusts the conduct of another sovereign's minister only permit him to request his master to withdraw the said minister from his Court, and at the most, and then only with the motive of avoiding further injury or staving off some great danger to the country, to cause him promptly to quit his dominions. But the interception and rifling of an Ambassador's dispatches, the laying violent and unruly hands on the Ambassador himself, is an affront so strange, so unheard of, and so contrary to the law of nations, that he begs of Your Majesty due reparation and a fitting satisfaction for an insult of such a nature.

## No. 15

INSTRUCTIONS FROM M. LE BLANC TO DESGRANGES,  
COMMANDANT OF THE CHÂTEAU DE DIJON

*30th December 1718.*

In order the more conveniently to maintain an exact and regular service, the officers in garrison at the Château

are being reinforced by twelve others from the Hôtel des Invalides. They will be expelled from the Château and punished if they are guilty of any irregularity.

Three of the Duchess's footmen desired to accompany her and are on the way. It was not considered advisable to deprive her of their services during the journey, but, on her arrival at the Château de Dijon, you must not permit them to enter. The same applies to Davranches, her valet-de-chambre, who is also among her suite.

As attendance at Mass might offer opportunities for holding unauthorised communications, I am asking M. de la Briffe to see, in company with the King's Engineer, how a gallery or some other place of the kind could be erected in the chapel, so that Madame la Duchesse du Maine, you, and her two waiting-women, might be present at the service without holding communication with anyone soever: you would favour me by arranging the matter with them.

#### No. 16

#### M. LE BLANC TO M. DESANGLES

His Royal Highness has need of a man in whom he can place entire confidence, and I thought I might answer for you. The matter relates to the command of the citadel of Chalon-sur-Saône during such period as Madame la Duchesse du Mayne may be detained there, and to the safe custody of that princess.

If the task suits you, all you have to do is to set out without delay, informing me immediately, on receipt of my letter, of the day on which you are starting. As you may not be very well off for cash, you will find herewith an order for a thousand livres on the treasurer of La Rochette. In the event of these duties not being to your taste, you will inform me with equal promptitude in order that His Royal Highness may choose some one



else in your stead. This opportunity may prove of considerable advantage to you later on, and that is why I have put it before you.

## No. 17

The Abbé B.<sup>1</sup> must be told that M. de P.<sup>2</sup> has declared that it was the Abbé B. who drew up all the papers against Monsieur le Duc d'Orléans, and that the best proof he can give of it is that they are all in the Abbé's handwriting, and that he had read them all over to Monsieur de Pompadour, who was terrified at the things they contained; that among other things, they dealt with three provinces that were supposed to be going to revolt, they being Brittany, etc.

That he, the Abbé, had entrusted M. de P. with several messages from the Ambassador to Madame du Maine and for other people of rank, and that the Abbé had, as it were, driven M. de P. into acting as intermediary between Madame du Maine and himself (the Abbé), who acted for the Ambassador . . . that M. de P. did not know how to shake off the Abbé, and that, to avoid him, he sometimes left the negotiations to Mme. de Pompadour. . . . It was the Abbé who used to treat with Madame du Maine.

. . . The Abbé Brigault alludes to himself as the author of the Filtz-Moritz letters in one of the intercepted documents.

*Undated memorandum, about the end of January 1719.*

## No. 18

The examination of Louise de Constant, widow of the Chevalier de Chauvigny (her second husband).

Her aunt, the Comtesse du Vivier, introduced to her

<sup>1</sup> Brigault.

<sup>2</sup> Pompadour.

the Sieur Ed. Camus, "who appeared to be an Ecclesiastic." He often came to see Madame de Chauvigny, with whom he discussed affairs of State in such a manner as made it evident that he was wholly in favour of the constitutional party and opposed to the interests of His Royal Highness.

Madame de Chauvigny, who felt there was some secret behind what he said, endeavoured to win his confidence in order that she might discover whether there was anything afoot against the prince. After M. le Duc's petition against the legitimated princes "the Sieur le Camus wrote Madame la Duchesse du Maine an anonymous letter offering her his services and putting forward defensive propositions. He suggested to the declarant that she herself should convey and deliver this same anonymous letter into the hands of Madame la Duchesse du Maine." Madame de Chauvigny made a copy, which she took to the Regent informing him that she was only leading on the Sieur le Camus in the interests of His Royal Highness. "The Prince commanded the declarant to take the original to Mme. du Maine and afterwards to give him an account, verbally or in writing, of whatever took place."

#### No. 19

It is approved that you should permit M. le Duc du Maine to take the air occasionally within the citadel. observing, however, every precaution against his speaking to anyone either by word or sign.

His Royal Highness is also agreeable to your taking your meals with him sometimes, but not so often as to make a regular habit of it.

You did right to send the store-keeper into the town. He received his commission from M. du Maine and there was reason to regard him as suspect. I will see what is

to be done to ensure the safety of the ordnance and artillery stores entrusted to his care. Meantime kindly have them attended to by one of the officers under your command.

With regard to the almoner, you may, if you think his services ought to be dispensed with, send him also into the town, and select any other priest you may think fit, in his place.

If the Duc falls ill "it will be seen to that a doctor is sent for from here."

He shall be given letters from his sister the Duchesse d'Orléans, and shall be supplied with ink and paper to reply. They must be taken away again as soon as he has finished with them.

Furniture, clothes, books, etc., are being sent on to him. I shall suggest every possible mitigation.

No. 20

THE DUC DU MAINE TO HIS SISTER THE DUCHESSE  
D'ORLÉANS

DOULLENS, *December 1719.*

My complete natural reserve, my fear of transgressing orders and my submission to M. le Régent, who, as it appears to me, is anxious to cause me suffering, do, as a matter of fact, prevent me from formulating requests which perhaps might not be granted ; still I only encounter willingness to oblige, and in M. de Favancourt I recognize an upright man, conscientious in the performance of his duties, and not anxious to be hard upon me. I should therefore be very vexed if he were removed, and I beg you to be assured that I am speaking in all sincerity. I am confident, Madame, that you are moved by my misfortunes, misfortunes which would turn my brain did God not lend me such powerful aid. Pity alone

would awake your sympathy even without those ties of kinship which plead with you on my behalf. Do not forsake me, therefore, but honour me always with your protection.

I certify that this is a true copy.

*Signed:* L. A. DE BOURBON.

No. 21

THE KING TO FAVANCOURT

*29th December 1719.*

M. de Favancourt : having been pleased, on the advice of my uncle the Duc d'Orléans, the Regent, to permit my uncle the Duc du Maine to leave my citadel of Doullens, where he is detained by my orders, and to proceed to his Château at Clagny, near Versailles, I am writing this letter to bid you suffer him to depart from my citadel, without delay or hindrance, so soon as he may desire.

No. 22

THE DUCHESS OF THE MAINE TO MME. DE LAMBERT

A terrible metamorphosis has taken place in me since your absence, Madame. I no longer discuss, no longer write. I verily believe that I no longer think. At the present time I can declare with truth that I have relapsed into nothingness. I had good reason to fear that the form in which you presented me had no reality about it. My poor wit was like one of those corpses which display an admirable beauty so long as they are animated by magic art, but are seen to be merely skeletons when the charm is removed. I exactly resemble those people who issue from a dream in which they fancied themselves possessed of riches in abundance, but who awake in despair to

find themselves as poor as ever. Of a verity, Madame, it were too cruel to leave me over long in such a position. I could but lay the blame upon you for all the revulsions of feeling caused by the change that has come about in me. Behold one of the most cruel. The Shepherd, seeing in me qualities so indifferent compared with those I had formerly displayed, has decided to desert; he has abandoned me in order to betake himself to M. Subtil and the Abbé de Bragelonne. Come back then, Madame, unless you wish to cause me all manner of misfortune. Come and make me once again such as I seemed to be by virtue of your enchantments.

## No. 23

## M. DE LA MOTTE TO MME. LA DUCHESSE DU MAINE

I will not forbear, Madame, to reply to that which you do *not* write. What Your Most Serene Highness says that she does not say, is worth more than what the rest say. Albeit I except Madame de Lambert who speaks so admirably of you, that I believe what she says, in spite of you. Your very letter vindicates her, in marvellous fashion, from all charges of hyperbole, and you have put the finishing touches on your portrait by disavowing it, so true a likeness it is. Great heavens, Madame, how vexed I am that I cannot go to S——! I see well enough that in that region it is Tuesday the whole week long. The Lamberts, the Dreuillets, the Sainte Aulaires and all the rest of them—they are worth a deal, no doubt, since they please you! And then, above all, a princess who helps people, however much wit they may have, to display still more. Where should we find what is exquisite, save there? I can assure you, Madame, that our Tuesday, if it heeds what I say, will be very modest, henceforth. 'Twill fear your presence no less

than it will long for it, and it will have great need to find comfort in the words of Madame de Lambert, who vows that you never make full use of your superiority. Be that as it may, Madame, come—come for the confusion of the vainglorious! For my part, to be humbled occasions me no embarrassment; I have a capital secret for that; I derive my welfare from the merit of others, from the pleasure it affords me. Come, Madame, and make us rich, come and charm us; expose yourself magnanimously to whatever sentiments your presence may call into being. We will suffer you to guess at those which are left unspoken, and everything shall be so wrapped round with respect that you will have nought to chide us for. One favour I beg of you, Madame; if you honour me with a word in reply, send it not to Madame de Lambert. I must needs have a L—— B—— de B——. I know not what fondness I have conceived for that name, but I swear to you I cannot be without it.

I am, Madame, with very profound respect,

Your Most Serene Highness's

Very humble and obedient Servant,

DE LA MOTTE.

No. 24

THE DUC DU MAINE TO THE MARÉCHAL DE NOAILLES

You have too quick a wit, Monsieur, and I flatter myself that my manner of thinking about you is too well known to you, for you not to have suspected, from my silence regarding the glory you have won by your total expulsion of the Imperialists, that I was vexed at having heard nothing of the matter from you. My chagrin was the greater since I had only commonplace replies to offer to those who, amid your most brilliant successes, did not forbear to express their astonishment that you had not attacked the rear of the enemy's force as they

were retiring upon Villafranca. But yesterday my vexation was suddenly dispelled on receiving your letter of the 27th of last month, though I had seen letters which were more explicit regarding the direction taken by the Imperial troops. To conclude, Monsieur, your happy and brilliant successes fill the heart of Madame la Duchesse du Mayne and my own, with a delight that I can scarcely express. The carabineers are charmed with you. Let me know, I beg you, if you are pleased with them.

L. A. DE BOURBON.





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